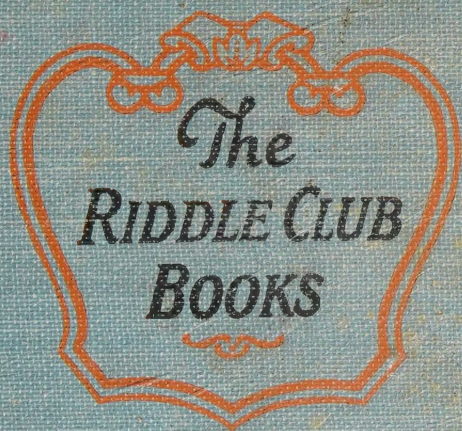


The RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS



ALICE DALE HARDY



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Merry Xmas to Eva

From Mama

Dec 25 1924



"THIS OUGHT TO SAVE US A MILE," SAID MR. MARLEY.
The Riddle Club Through the Holidays. Frontispiece—(Page 232)

THE RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

The Club and Its Doings.
How the Riddles Were Solved.
And What the Snowman Revealed

BY
ALICE DALE HARDY

AUTHOR OF "THE RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME," "THE RIDDLE CLUB
IN CAMP," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
WALTER S. ROGERS

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BY ALICE DALE HARDY

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THE RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME

THE RIDDLE CLUB IN CAMP

THE RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

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The Riddle Club Through the Holidays

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THE RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

CHAPTER I

LOOKING AHEAD

"I *did* have ten cents, but I spent it," explained Ward Larue carefully.

Fred Williamson shook the bank he held in his hand till the contents rattled.

"What did you spend it for?" he demanded.

"A magnifying glass," admitted Ward. "I needed one."

"I never saw such a boy for spending money," complained Fred. "You will end up in the poor-house, see if you don't!"

"I guess if I paid ten cents in for Riddle Club dues, it wouldn't save me from going to the poor-house," objected Ward.

"No, I don't think it would, either," said Jess Larue, Ward's sister.

Fred gazed at the circle in despair.

"You don't any of you have the right idea

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about these club dues," he informed them. "You seem to think I want the money to go off and spend on myself. There's no use in having a treasurer, unless you're willing to put something in the treasury."

"Oh, but, Fred! we are willing," protested Polly Marley, president of the Riddle Club. "Of course we're willing. The only reason I didn't pay to-day was because I didn't have ten cents."

"And why didn't you?" said Fred, for all the world, Ward thought, like the orators who spoke in River Bend on the Fourth of July. "Why didn't you?"

Polly was not awed by Fred's rhetoric. She laughed at him.

"I didn't have ten cents," she giggled, "because I loaned it to some one."

"Artie, I suppose," grumbled Fred. He considered that his position as treasurer gave him the right to ask any amount of personal questions when dues were not forthcoming.

"No-o, it wasn't Artie," said Polly, still smiling.

"But Artie hasn't paid his dues, either," declared Fred, fixing that small boy with a stern eye. "Where's your ten cents, Artie?"

Artie Marley, Polly's brother, wriggled uneasily.

"Now——" he stammered, "now, I had ten cents. But I haven't got it now. I'll pay you the next meeting, Fred."

"What did you do with the dime you had?" asked Fred.

"I spent it for ink," said Artie, solemnly. "If I'm going to write a book, I have to write it in ink, don't I?"

Artie Marley was much given to reading books, and now his modest desire was to write one.

"I don't think you need a whole bottle of ink to write a book with," said Fred, judiciously. "You could have borrowed your mother's ink and saved the ten cents."

Artie gazed at him with respect. He had had the same thought himself, he declared.

"But when I took the bottle from Mother's desk, I spilled most of it on the stairs," he confessed. "And so I had to take half of the new ink I bought to fill her bottle up so she wouldn't miss it."

"Well, the next time," Fred instructed him, "you want to buy something, you pay your dues first. You ought to have some sense of—of—some sense of duty!" he concluded magnificently.

"I paid my dues!" exclaimed Fred's twin sister, Margy. "Didn't I, Fred?"

The air with which Margy Williamson said this

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was too much for Jess. In spite of Polly's warning tug at her dress she spoke "right out in meeting," as her grandmother would have said.

"The reason you paid your dues, Margy Williamson," said Jess, clearly, "is because you borrowed the money from Polly. That's why she couldn't pay hers."

Margy flushed and Fred frowned.

"I liked lending it to Margy," said Polly, hurriedly. "If I'd kept it, likely as not I would have spent it. Margy's going to pay me back next week."

"What I don't understand," announced Fred, still frowning, "is why this club is so hard up. We paid dues before we went to camp, and though I won't say you fell over yourselves to pay, I didn't have the trouble I'm having now."

And Fred wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, as though he found his duties almost too much for him.

"Well, we didn't pay dues all summer," said Polly, slowly, "and I think we forgot—If you get out of a habit, you know, it's hard to pick it up again. Didn't any one pay this time, Fred?"

"Only Margy," said Fred, gloomily, "and she borrowed the money."

"Didn't you?" struck in Artie, quickly.

"Well," said Fred, lamely, "I had to contribute

to the post-card fund in school. That took my dime."

Ward and Artie fell into each other's arms and tumbled over on the floor. It was their way of expressing delight.

"All the same," declared Fred, raising his voice above the laughter that greeted his confession, "the next time this club meets, no one is going to be allowed to leave this room without paying their dues."

Polly Marley was a tactful girl, and she knew when to change a subject.

"We haven't decided about Hallowe'en," she reminded them.

"That's so," agreed Fred, with relief. "Are we going to have a party?"

"Mother doesn't want Ward and me to dress up and just go around," said Jess. "So I think we'd better have a party—just us, you know. We don't need any one else."

The six members of the Riddle Club smiled at one another. They had the best of good times when "just us" and no outsiders were invited. Weren't they back from a summer in camp where they proved their theory once more? Their tanned faces and bright eyes showed what a healthful summer it had been and their good spirits spoke for their happiness.

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"It's our turn to have a party," said Margy Williamson, eagerly. "Polly and Artie had us Hallowe'en last year. We can have the kitchen at our house and do anything we please."

"I thought you'd come to our house; but it's all right that way," said Polly. "Shall we dress up?"

"Oh, I don't think it's one bit of fun unless we dress up and wear false-faces," declared Margy.

"We'll know each other—can't help it, with only six of us," demurred Fred.

"That's all right—we can pretend to be fooled," said Jess Larue.

So it was decided to wear costumes and false-faces.

"Is the window open?" asked Polly, suddenly, with a shiver.

"Closed," reported Fred. "Gee! there is a blast coming from somewhere."

"The door's swung open," said Artie, rising to close it.

"I think it's awfully cold up here," said Margy, with customary frankness.

She wore a sweater, and so did the other girls, but there was no denying the clubroom in the loft of the barn was chilly.

"I've just thought!" went on Margy. "What

shall we do when it's winter? We'll freeze to death up here."

Jess looked distressed. The room was in her father's barn, and she had never considered the advent of cold weather. The Riddle Club had been formed in the spring, and the meetings had been held—until the trip to camp—very comfortably in the little room.

"That's so," said Polly now. "We can't meet here in winter. I don't see what we are going to do."

"It won't be winter for perfect ages," declared the hopeful Jess. "To-day is what Dora calls an 'odd day.' She was saying this morning that we'll probably have warm weather again. There's Indian summer—we haven't had that yet. I don't think it's really cold up here—do you?"

"Not really cold," answered Polly. "But I'm thinking of December. It will be cold then."

"How did the horses and cows keep warm when they stayed in this barn?" questioned Artie. "Were they cold, too?"

"Of course not!" retorted Ward. "Horses and cows are never cold. They like cold weather."

"They keep each other warm," said Fred, remembering something he had heard. "The animal heat in their bodies keeps them warm. Be-

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sides, farmers put blankets on their horses in the winter time."

"We could wrap up in blankets," suggested Polly.

"My mother is very particular about her blankets," said Margy. "She won't let us take them for tents, and she has to have them washed a certain way. I don't believe she would ever let us have them out here in the barn."

The other members of the Riddle Club were equally sure that their mothers would object to lending blankets for club meetings.

"Well, there ought to be some way," said Ward, thoughtfully. "Couldn't we put in a furnace?"

"A furnace!" chorused the club. "What kind of a furnace?"

"Oh, a furnace," repeated Ward. "A regular furnace, you know. That would keep us nice and warm."

"And where," asked Fred, in some amazement, "would we get the money to buy a furnace?"

"I don't think they cost much," said Ward. "Perhaps we have enough in your bank."

Fred groaned in anguish and Polly laughed.

"That's it," said Fred, bitterly. "Never want to pay a cent in, but always willing to let it all go out. Take the last penny in the bank—what

do you care? Why should dues worry you? They're only something to throw away."

"Don't spend your old dues, if you don't want to," snapped Ward. "I don't care whether you put in a furnace or not; I'm never cold. It's the girls who are making a fuss."

"A furnace costs a heap of money," put in Polly, wisely. "We never could afford that. Besides, Mr. Larue wouldn't let us. We might set fire to the barn."

"Well, how about that old gasoline stove that Mother threw away last week?" suggested Artie. "There's nothing the matter with it, except it leaks."

"How much more do you want the matter with it?" inquired Fred. "No gasoline stove comes into this clubroom while I'm a member."

"Then what shall we have?" asked Jess, sadly.

"I was just thinking that an electric heater wouldn't be so bad," said Fred. "We could run wires from the pole out in front and connect it with the heater in here. We could light the barn with the same current, too, and perhaps have meetings at night. That would be fun, wouldn't it?"

"We could have our Hallowe'en party out here," cried Polly. "Think of having it in the barn! Such heaps of fun!"

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"I don't see where you expect to get the money," said Ward, coldly. "If we can't touch those precious old dues, how are you going to have electric lights? Mr. Brewer had them put in his barn last week and it cost more than fifty dollars. He told Daddy so. They didn't have to run the wires as far as we shall, either."

"Have we fifty dollars in the bank?" asked Jess, curiously.

"Nowhere near," Fred informed her. "I guess that knocks out the electric heater idea. The only thing I can see that we can do is to bring hot water bottles with us, when it is cold."

"We can have an ice hut and crawl inside," giggled Polly. "The Eskimos manage somehow, and we will, too, I guess."

"Anyway, it isn't cold yet, not real cold," argued Jess. "And when it does snow, it will bank the window and make it warmer. I don't believe we'll need any kind of a heater or furnace."

"It's going to be dark earlier every time, too," said Margv, who had a habit of looking ahead. "In December it will be pitch dark long before five o'clock. There's Mrs. Pepper feeding her hens now. I don't believe it's much after four."

"Here, chick, chick, chick!" they could hear

Mrs. Pepper, a neighbor, calling. "Here, chick, chick, chick!"

"You never catch Carrie feeding those hens," said Jess, peering through the window. "Oh, say, what do you know——" Her voice trailed off without completing the sentence and her dark eyes began to dance.

Polly was ready to ask her what she was thinking, but the boys wanted the meeting adjourned. So in a few minutes they were rushing down the loft ladder, Ward having first carefully locked the clubroom door.

"Remember, everybody come over to our house after school to-morrow," said Margy, as the group separated at the door, the two Larues to go into their house to supper and the other four to cross the street to the Marley and the Williamson houses, which were next door to each other. "We'll plan about the Hallowe'en party."

CHAPTER II

PARTY PLANS

THE RIDDLE CLUB were very strict about not using their clubroom for any purpose other than club meetings. The six members were practically inseparable, going to school together, playing and working together most of the time outside of school. But no matter what they did, or what they wanted to play, unless they had a meeting of their Riddle Club on hand, the clubroom was left in perfect order and kept locked.

Perhaps you know all about the Riddle Club, but if you don't, a few words will introduce you. It had been Polly Marley's idea—this club—and she was the president. Fred Williamson was treasurer. Fred and Margy were twins, Artie was Polly Marley's younger brother, and Ward and Jess Larue were brother and sister. Jess was two years older than Ward. These children lived in River Bend, a town on the Rocio River. Mr. Larue was the president of the line of steamboats that went up and down the river, carrying freight and passengers.

In the first book of this series, named "The Riddle Club at Home," it has been told how the Riddle Club flourished and spurred another group of boys and girls to form a rival club. This was known as the Conundrum Club, and Carrie Pepper was its president. They challenged the members of the Riddle Club to a memorable riddle contest and the latter came out victors.

Of course it was not to be thought of that a summer should separate such close friends, so what could be more natural than for the whole six to go camping at Lake Bassing? They took the Riddle Club with them, by-laws, president, treasurer and all, and what happened to them during a delightful two months, you may read in the second book of the series, called "The Riddle Club in Camp." They camped on an island, and above them lived a queer old hermit on another island, while below their camp was another island on which the Conundrum Club established themselves.

Things were bound to happen with such a lively sextette around, and no one was disappointed. Artie fell over a bluff. The Conundrum Club suggested another riddle contest, which proved to be not much more to their advantage than the first. Then the children were able to solve the mystery of the kind old hermit. Next, as the

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season was nearly over, they won the loving cup in the water carnival. Add to all this the new friends they made and the out-of-door glad days they had, and you'll understand that the summer went too quickly to please them.

But schools will open in September, and the Riddle Club had to come back to River Bend. They were unexpectedly glad to get back to their own homes and to the clubroom in the Larue barn. This room had been given to them from the first meeting, and to the furniture they had collected for it, they were able to add several interesting trophies from their summer in camp.

There was the beautiful silver loving cup; a sketch of the entire club membership, made by an artist and framed for them by Mrs. Marley; the pennant they had flown in camp from their flag pole; not to mention a gun for which Artie had paid a dollar and which wouldn't shoot but which, he thought, gave a distinguished touch to the room.

Jess mentioned the gun when, the next day, the chums met at the Williamsons' house to discuss plans for their Hallowe'en party.

"I think," she said soberly, "that we ought to give a play Thanksgiving and let Artie be a Puritan and carry his gun."

"Oh, let's!" cried Margy, with enthusiasm. "Let's give a play! Mother gave me her old black lace dress yesterday! I could wear that."

If there was one thing Margy loved to do, it was to "dress up" in grown people's finery and sweep about and pretend that she was a princess.

"Who'll write the play?" demanded Fred.

"You and Polly," said Ward so promptly that Fred couldn't help laughing.

"I thought you'd say something like that," declared Fred. "But you can change your ideas right away. I know what we're going to do Thanksgiving, but it isn't that."

"Fred!" said Polly, in a warning voice. "You told me you'd promised you wouldn't tell."

"Well, who's telling?" demanded Fred. "I haven't said a word."

Of course that drove the others frantic with curiosity, but though they teased and coaxed and, finally, Ward and Artie threw themselves on Fred and got him down on the rug, not another word could they shake from him.

"You'll know all about it in plenty of time," he kept repeating.

"Does Polly know?" demanded Jess.

"No," replied Fred; "not even Polly knows. No one knows but me."

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"Not Mother or Dad or Dora or——" Ward was beginning in a sing-song tone, but Fred put a hand gently over his mouth.

"Do keep still," he said good-humoredly. "All the mothers and fathers know. Now stop asking questions."

"You said no one knew except you alone," Artie protested.

"I meant no one in the Riddle Club except me," explained Fred.

"Well, anyway, we have Hallowe'en to think about," said Polly, the tactful. "If we're going to wear costumes, it's time we planned 'em."

"I had a perfectly wonderful idea," declared Jess. "But I don't know that I'll tell it now; I can keep secrets, too."

"Oh, Jess, darling, this isn't a secret—it won't be one very long, at any rate," said Polly, softly. "We'll all know soon, and it is something we'll just love to do. I'm sure of that. Tell us your idea, Jess! Please do."

It was impossible to resist Polly when she spoke like that, and Jess yielded. As a matter of fact, she had kept her wonderful idea to herself about as long as she cared to. She had reached the point where she was eager to share it with some one.

"I think it would be a good idea," she said

proudly, "to come to the party dressed like animals!"

They stared at her silently, and she was disappointed. She had the plan so clearly in her own mind, she thought it must be plain to them all.

"Yes, animals," Jess repeated. "You know all the people who go to Hallowe'en parties dress like clowns and gypsies and dancing girls and Brownies, and like that. Well, at our party, why couldn't we come dressed like—like chickens and pigs and things?"

A shout of laughter interrupted her.

"Ward would make a handsome pig," said Artie, a little unkindly.

Ward was a very fat boy, with a round, good-natured face that flushed at the slightest exertion. He couldn't run two blocks without getting out of breath.

"I'll be a pig," said Ward now, "if you'll be the goat."

Artie reached for him and they went over on the rug in one of their friendly tussles. Mrs. Williamson had given them the dining-room to meet in, and had told them to have "all the fun you want."

"I'm going to be a chicken," announced Jess, fearful that some one else might want to take her character. "I thought of it yesterday when we

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were watching Mrs. Pepper feed her chickens."

"Where will you get the feathers?" asked the practical Margy.

"Oh, there must be feathers somewhere," said Jess, carelessly. "I'll fix that part all right."

"It would be kind of fun, wouldn't it?" Fred decided. "I wonder if we can get animal false-faces? I'm going to ask Dad to-night."

Mr. Williamson kept the department store in River Bend, and he always carried a stock of false-faces for Hallowe'en. Fred was sure that if there were such things as "animal faces" his father would have them.

"Let's not tell what kind of animals we're going to be," suggested Polly. "I love to be surprised."

"You'd better tell your mother, Margy," said Ward. "If she sees a bunch of animals coming to her house Hallowe'en night, she may think a circus broke loose somewhere and not let us in."

"You can't scare my mother," declared Margy, proudly. "I don't believe she'd be afraid of an elephant, if she met him. Not on Hallowe'en, at any rate."

"We're going to have the house to ourselves—did you know that?" said Fred. "Everything we need for the party will be all ready in the kitchen, and Mother is going to leave things to eat

in the pantry. She and Dad are going over to Ward's house. And Mr. and Mrs. Marley, too."

"They'll have a party of their own, I guess," said Jess. "I don't believe it is much fun for them to duck for apples and do the things we do. They would rather listen to Mrs. Marley play the piano and my mother play her violin than fuss around with Hallowe'en games."

"They're going to have the radio set that night, too," Ward announced. "Fred said he'd take it down from the clubroom and set it up in the parlor. There's a big musical program from some city that night."

Fred was the wireless expert of the Riddle Club. He had first put up the handsome radio set the club had been given for their share in the capture of some radio thieves, and had taken it down and set it up in camp that summer as well. Then, when the time came to come home, he had taken down the tree aërials and had brought the set back to the Larue barn and set it up again in the clubroom. Now for this special night he would attach a loud speaker and arrange it in the Larue parlor so that the listening parents might enjoy the concert.

But the girls and boys could not talk long of this grown-up affair when their own thrilling party was yet to be arranged. They were used to plan-

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ning their parties, and their mothers thought that in this way they had twice the usual amount of fun. Nearly every one can go to a party, if invited, but not every one could plan a party if he had to. The members of the Riddle Club did do both nicely.

"We're going to have all the games we can think of," said Margy. "Picking a ring out of a plate of flour; trying to bite a marshmallow on a string; ducking for apples, of course. What else, Fred?"

"I know," cried Artie, before Fred could answer. "Go out in the garden and pull up a cabbage. I read about it in a book."

CHAPTER III

JESS HAS LUCK

ALL of the other members of the Riddle Club stared at Artie in blank wonder.

"Cabbages?" cried Fred.

"What do we pull up a cabbage for?" Margy demanded, curiously.

"To see whether you'll be rich or poor," said Artie, as though that settled the matter.

"How will you know whether you'll be rich and poor?" Ward demanded.

"Not rich and poor," Artie corrected him. "Who ever heard of any one being rich and poor? Rich *or* poor, silly."

"Well, all right," agreed Ward, amiably. "Rich or poor then. How'll we know we're going to be rich or poor by looking at a cabbage?"

Artie perceived that he would have to explain.

"You tell by the dirt," he said seriously.

"The dirt?" echoed Margy. "What dirt?"

"The dirt on the roots of the cabbage," said Artie. "If a lot of dirt sticks, that's a sign you're

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going to be rich; if there isn't much dirt, you're going to be poor."

"Oh!" said Margy.

"I think that will be fun," said Jess, briskly.

"I call it a fool stunt, but we'll try it," Fred decided. "Know any more, Artie?"

Artie thought for a moment.

"I know about making wishes," he said, and paused.

"Well, don't stop," Polly urged. "Go on and tell us."

Artie was as fond of talking as any of the rest, but he had an odd habit of stopping suddenly, just when his listeners thought he was well started.

"You make a wish," he began again, "and then you must go upstairs and down twice, outdoors and all around the house and around the barn—Of course, Mr. Williamson hasn't any barn," Artie interrupted himself to say; "but the summer-house will do, I guess. The book said an 'outdoor building,' and a summerhouse must be an outdoor building. Say, Fred, isn't a summer-house an outdoor building?"

"Oh, of course it is," the impatient Fred assured him. "Hurry up, Artie, I'm going to sleep."

"Where was I?" asked Artie, calmly.

"The wishes," Margy prodded. "We make a wish and walk upstairs and downstairs twice and around the house——"

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Artie. "Well, you walk around the house and the barn and then you come in again."

"Then what happens?" asked Ward.

"Your wishes come true," Artie said.

"Well, I call that too queer for anything," remarked Jess, and the others were inclined to agree with her.

"I don't see how walking around like that can make wishes come true," said Fred.

"It's the not speaking," explained Artie. "That does it."

Polly stared at her brother.

"The—the *what?*" she demanded.

"Not speaking. You know, even if some one calls to you or asks a question, you can't say a word till you've been all around and come back," said Artie.

"You never said anything about that," Margy informed him. "Can't we speak while we're walking around the house?"

"My, no, not a word," said Artie, placidly. "After you make the wish, you can't say another word till you've been up- and downstairs and around the house and barn."

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"Let's do that! It sounds awfully spooky," declared Margy.

"Be sure you find out about the false-faces tonight, Fred," said Polly. "If your father hasn't any, we'll have to make some."

Nothing ever daunted Polly. If she could not find what she wanted ready-made, she made it herself.

"And another thing," said Margy. "Being the Riddle Club, why can't we ask some riddles? I mean short ones—one apiece."

"All right," agreed Jess.

"Maybe we can get some about animals," suggested Artie.

"Oh, any kind of riddle will do," declared the president of the club.

The plans for the party made, the six chums made fudge as a grand wind-up to the afternoon. They went home to supper, where the candy apparently made little difference in their hearty appetites.

Hallowe'en was not far away, and if their animal costumes were to be made, it was necessary to start work upon them at once. Fred's father had almost every kind of false-face manufactured, but he had no animal ones. Perhaps, as Jess proudly said, they were the first to dress up as animals for Hallowe'en. Anyway, Polly

would have to make the faces. That was clear.

There was a great deal of laughing and whispering going on every afternoon after school in each of the three houses on Elm Road. Artie and Ward shared some joke together, and they might be heard shouting and laughing soon after they had turned the key in Ward's or Artie's room door, as the case might be.

"I think they're dancing," Jess confided to Polly. "They shake the ceiling of the dining-room. Ward's room is right over the dining-room, you know."

"Artie hates to dance," Polly returned. "You couldn't make him. No, it's something else. I don't know what. They shake the house when they're over here, too."

For not even Polly was to know what animals were represented. Every one was so determined to keep his or her costume a secret that it had been decided that "any kind of face" was to be worn.

"Of course they won't match," said Jess. "But that will be even more fun."

Jess was having a thrilling time trying to get her costume together. She had set her heart on going as a chicken, and every one knows that if there is one thing a chicken cannot do without, it is feathers.

"I can manage the wings," she confided to

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Dora, the good-natured maid in her mother's kitchen, "because I can use those two turkey wings we had left from last Thanksgiving. But where will I get the rest of the feathers?"

Good fortune smiled unexpectedly on Jess. At least, she thought it was good fortune. Passing Mrs. Pepper's house one morning on her way to the store for her mother—it was Saturday—Jess spied a barrel standing at the edge of the drive. It was filled with soft, fluffy chicken feathers!

"Oh, Mrs. Pepper, are you throwing those feathers *away*?" asked Jess, in the tone of one who has found a neighbor tossing out a gold mine.

Mrs. Pepper was raking leaves from her lawn. Carrie usually stayed in bed late Saturday mornings, and she was not up yet.

"Why, yes, Jess, I put that barrel out for the junk man. He comes through town on Saturdays," answered Mrs. Pepper. "Those feathers aren't good enough to save for pillows, and I don't like to burn them."

"Could—could I have them?" asked Jess, her eyes shining.

"My lands, child! what do you want with them?" exclaimed Mrs. Pepper. "Take them and welcome, of course; but I'll need the barrel back. Barrels are scarce, and I like to make mine last."

"I'll bring the barrel right back," promised Jess, joyfully. "Thank you ever so much, Mrs. Pepper."

Mrs. Pepper stared at her as the small girl began to roll the barrel toward her side lawn. The Pepper property joined Mr. Larue's, and Jess had not far to go. The feathers, of course, weighed almost nothing, and the task was not difficult, but Mrs. Pepper stood racking her brains to think what use Jess could have for the down and bits of feathers she had thrown away. She was still standing there ten minutes later when Carrie came out.

"Jess Larue took those feathers?" Carrie repeated, when her mother told her. "I don't see what on earth she wants them for! Why didn't you make her tell you before you gave her the barrel?"

"I believe in minding my own affairs," said Mrs. Pepper, tartly.

She kept a great many chickens and sold them dressed; that is, killed and with the feathers taken off. Her good feathers she saved for pillows, but the stuff that filled the barrel was down from young chickens and broken feathers that were of no use to her.

Jess rolled her barrel up to the side door of

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the house and reached the hall before Dora spied her.

"Where you going, Jess, with that dirty old barrel?" she asked suspiciously.

"I'm taking it up to my room," replied Jess.

"What's in it—let me look," replied Dora. "Feathers! Jess, for goodness' sake, roll that barrel outside, quick! If your mother was to catch you scattering those nasty little pin feathers all over the house, she'd tell you a thing or two!"

"I'm not going to scatter them," Jess argued. "Help me carry the barrel up to my room, will you, Dora? I have to take it back."

When Dora understood that the barrel was to go back to Mrs. Pepper, she was more determined than ever that Jess should not take it up to her room.

"I know exactly what you'd do, Jess," Dora said. "You'd dump those feathers out on your bedroom floor and take the empty barrel back; and in less than five minutes, every rug and carpet in this house, to say nothing of the chairs and the sofas, would have pin feathers sticking in them."

"Well, where can I put them?" asked Jess, realizing that unless Dora was willing to help her she could not hope to get the barrel up the stairs. "I have to have these feathers for Hallowe'en, Dora."

"Take them out in the barn, to be sure," said Dora. "Why you and Ward don't want to play in the barn, beats me. Many a child would be thankful for such a light, clean place to stay in. You can make all the noise you want, too, and do as you please out there. And you're forever hanging around the house."

"It's cold," said Jess, absently, but her mind was busy with another problem. She had remembered that she needed flour paste.

"If I take the feathers out to the barn, Dora," she said coaxingly, "how about some flour paste? Let me make some?"

"You're too hard on the flour barrel," declared Dora, good-naturedly. "Be off to the barn now and leave your barrel there; then go and get the soap your mother promised me and I'll have the paste ready for you when you come back."

Jess was willing, and she rolled the barrel out to the barn. She was glad that Ward was over with Artie Marley, for it gave her an opportunity to make her Hallowe'en costume without an audience. She dumped the feathers on the floor of the barn, not minding in the least that they flew about and lighted, many of them, in her hair and on her blouse and skirt, then rolled the empty barrel back to the Pepper driveway.

Carrie saw her and called to her to wait, but

Jess shouted that she was going to the store and ran off quickly. It was not part of her plan to have Carrie's sharp eyes and Carrie's quick tongue ferret out her secret.

True to her promise, Dora had a generous basin of flour paste ready for Jess when she came back from the store, and the girl took it gratefully and went out to the barn. She made several trips to the house for things she needed, scissors, newspapers, and a paper of pins were among them, but at last she was evidently equipped, for she stayed in the barn.

"Where's Jess?" asked Polly and Margy, half an hour later, at the Larue back door.

"Out in the barn—at least, she was a little while ago," answered Dora. "I haven't heard a word from her since I made her a bowl of flour paste."

Polly and Margy went out to the barn. The sliding door was pushed half-way open, and there on the barn floor they beheld a remarkable sight. They stared, wondering what it could be.

"Jess!" called Polly, uncertainly. "Jess! is that you?"

CHAPTER IV

HALLOWE'EN FUN

"COME away," whispered Margy. "That isn't Jess."

But it was Jess. The rolling figure sat up and stared at them with Jess's own brown eyes.

"Hello!" said Jess, none too cordially.

"What in the world are you doing?" asked Margy, more frankly than politely.

"I'm busy," answered Jess.

"You're a sight— isn't she, Polly?" said Margy.

Polly didn't wish to agree, but the truth was that Jess was the most remarkable looking girl she had ever seen. She seemed to be covered with feathers—her hair and face and hands. They were on her shoes, her stockings, and parts of her dress. There was almost as much dirt and dust mixed with the feathers as there was flour paste, and that had evidently been used in liberal quantities.

"What *are* you doing?" asked Polly, helplessly.

"Well, if you must know," said Jess, "I'm mak-

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ing my Hallowe'en costume. Only these mean old feathers aren't much good," she added fretfully. "They won't stay stuck."

She went on to explain that she had cut a chicken out of newspapers—"both sides and sewed it in the middle"—and had spread the paste over this. The plan was to roll in the feathers with this on and in this way the pattern would be covered with feathers which would dry on. Then, with the addition of the turkey wings, Jess would be ready for the party.

"I have a pair of bright yellow stockings I never wore, and I am going to paint my shoes yellow, too," she announced, in a burst of confidence.

Polly wanted to laugh, but she was afraid of hurting Jess's feelings.

"It looks pretty messy just now," said Polly. "But perhaps when it dries it will be all right. You're taking a lot of trouble, aren't you, Jess?"

"Well, I like things to be right," admitted Jess. "I think it will be fun to have animals at the party. Margy, will you stick a handful of feathers on that bare place? Here, put some more paste on first."

Margy didn't want to put her hands in the feathers, so Polly had to come to the rescue. Then she helped Jess take the paper off, which was

difficult, for it was wet and heavy with paste and easily torn.

"You mustn't wear it again till the night of the party," Polly cautioned the designer. "You'll wear it out, if you're not careful."

"I won't touch it till Hallowe'en," promised Jess. "But now you've seen mine, I think you ought to tell me what you're going to wear," she declared.

"I'm going to be a leopard," said Polly, instantly. "It's because we had some spotted flannel in the house."

"And Mother is going to lend me her old astrakhan coat, so I can be a lamb," said Margy. "I think lambs are lovely. I wouldn't want to be any kind of homely animal, even for fun."

Jess's dark eyes grew round with curiosity.

"What do you suppose the boys are going to wear?" she asked.

But no one knew, and up to the night of the party no one had found out. It had been agreed among the six friends that each was to go alone to the Williamson house, so it happened that the three girls and Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were already in the big, roomy kitchen, where the party was to be, when some one knocked at the door.

"That's Fred! I know it is!" exclaimed

Margy. "I just heard him go down the front stairs and out. He's come around to the back door."

Margy was wearing her mother's woolly coat, and with her shiny black shoes and black silk gloves—to represent the forefeet—made a very cunning and attractive little lamb—till one's glance reached her face. Her false-face was that of an old witch, and the contrast between this grinning old-woman face and the woolly young lamb was too much for Mr. Williamson. He had gone into fits of laughter as soon as he saw Margy.

The arrival of Polly, in spotted flannel that covered her hands and feet much as a sleeping garment would, her face hidden behind a "Brownie" false-face, made Mr. Williamson laugh, too. But when Jess arrived, Mrs. Williamson was really alarmed about him. He laughed so hard he had to take out his handkerchief and wipe his eyes.

Even Polly and Margy had to laugh at Jess. She wore her feather suit, as she called the paper and feather costume, and she had rigged up the turkey wings with string so that they flapped—sometimes—when she pulled the string. As the nearest thing to a chicken's head she could get in a false-face, she had chosen a mask with an

extremely long and hooked nose that, she fondly hoped, looked like a chicken's beak. She had taken an old pair of shoes and covered them with bright yellow paint, buttons and all.

Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were only waiting to greet the guests before going over to spend the evening at the Larue house. Answering the knock at the door, Mr. Williamson opened it and a kangaroo leaped into the room. For a moment the girls were startled, and then they saw that it was Fred.

"I think that's a fine costume, Fred," said Polly. "Did you make it?"

"Mother helped," replied Fred, hopping around the kitchen the better to show off his brown flannel suit and long tail. It covered his head and eyes so that he didn't need a mask, and when he crouched in a sitting position, Polly assured him that he looked exactly like the pictures of kangaroos they had seen in their school geographies.

Rat-a-tat-tat! went a knock on the door.

"Bet that's Artie," said Fred, confidently.

"Ward, more likely," declared Jess. "He was getting ready when I started to come."

Mr. Williamson opened the door, and they all leaned forward to look.

First a long, long neck stretched itself into the

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kitchen, then an ungainly, rather square body, mounted on four legs, followed. This queer-looking creature was spotted in circles, and had a long, thin tail.

"A giraffe!" cried Jess, guessing first.

"Artie and Ward! Well, what do you know about that!" shouted Fred. "Why didn't you tell a fellow?"

"Wanted to surprise you," croaked the giraffe. "Guess we did it."

And to Fred's amazement, the long neck twisted several times around his own neck in what was meant to be an affectionate embrace.

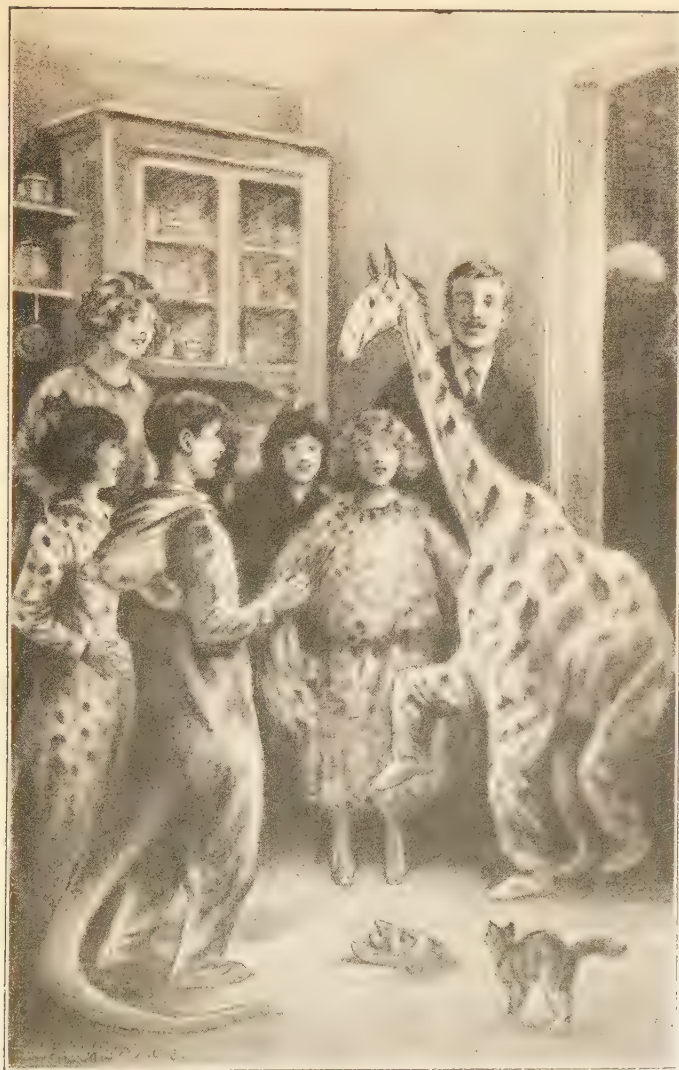
"Here—let go of me—get out!" cried Fred, trying to back away. "What kind of a neck have you, a rubber one?"

The girls giggled and Mr. Williamson untangled the long neck carefully.

"Don't let it rip," begged the giraffe. "If it comes unsewed the whole thing will be spoiled. That's the old rubber hose in that neck."

"So that's what you've been doing so long," said Polly. "I see! That's why you were shaking the ceiling."

"Well, if you think it's easy to walk in this, you ought to try it," said Artie's voice. "Ward had to be the front because he is taller, and I'm



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the back legs. At first we walked into each other and couldn't turn corners without making a mess of it. But now we do fine."

"I don't know whether it is safe to leave this menagerie or not, Mother," said Mr. Williamson, smiling. "But we won't be so far away that we can't get back if we're needed. Now, youngsters," he added to the children, "go as far as you like and have all the fun you want. But don't go off the grounds and don't set the house on fire. Fred, I trust your good sense to know when to stop."

"Good-bye," cried the animals, crowding to the door. "Good-bye. We're going to have a lovely party."

Mr. and Mrs. Williamson looked back and laughed. The light from the kitchen streamed through the doorway and showed a wild-looking group on the porch.

"I'm glad they didn't want any others," said Mrs. Williamson, as they reached the Larue house. "They get on so well together that they do not really need any more to make a party."

Left alone, Margy and Fred, as host and hostess, announced that the games would begin at once. Of course the false-faces had to come off and the gloves, too, and Fred had to fold back

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his brown hood, while Artie and Ward had to step "out of their skin," as they put it, to duck for apples.

This was not Ward's favorite pastime, for it always made him gasp dreadfully; but he wouldn't beg off, and manfully went groping about under the water till he nearly choked. He never succeeded in getting hold of an apple, but Fred brought up two and Polly one, while Jess and Artie each lifted one by the stem, merely to drop it before it reached the surface.

Then they tackled the swaying marshmallow on the string, and most of them were liberally coated with the snowy powder before Margy grasped the mallow in her strong little white teeth and swallowed it and nearly swallowed the string, too.

"Now the plate of flour," commanded Fred, when the marshmallow was gone. "Put your hands behind you, every one, and do your best."

Ward made a desperate effort, but, unfortunately, opened his eyes when his face was buried in the flour and coughed and sputtered so much as he tried to wink them clear again, that Fred pulled him out in great alarm.

"Let me try," begged Artie.

He took a deep breath, shut his eyes, and ducked into the flour for the hidden ring. Alas,

he had found the ring and was ready to take it in his teeth when he found he could not hold his breath another minute. He let it out in one great rush, and the flour flew in all directions, most of it landing on the interested five standing near.

"Never mind," said Margy, kindly, for Artie looked distressed. "We have plenty more flour, and Mother said she didn't care how much mess we made in the kitchen. It's easy to clean."

So the ring was hidden in the flour again, and Jess tried and failed to find it. Polly was the one who finally brought it to light.

"And now I guess it is time we had the riddles," said the president of the club. "Each girl is to ask a boy a riddle and then each boy is to do the same thing to a girl. 'Jess, you can start if you want to.'"

"All right. Artie, what word may be pronounced quicker by adding a syllable to it?"

"That's a real hard one," grumbled Artie. "Why didn't you make it easier?"

"I know that one," shouted Ward.

"Guess, Artie," said Polly. "Hurry, we don't want to lose time over the riddles."

"I guess it's fast, because you add E-R and then it's faster."

"Almost right," replied Jess. "The word is quick. Add E-R and you have quicker."

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"I've one for you, Ward," said Margy. "Why is an egg like a young colt?"

"Oh, I've got you, Margy! The answer is because neither can be used until broken."

"What do you mean—broken?" asked Jess. "I mean of a colt?"

"Why, a colt is broken to harness," explained Margy, impatiently. "They are of no account until they're broken."

"Now it's my turn," said Polly. "Fred, here is a real mannish riddle: What is the best bet made—one covering everything?"

"Gee, that's some bet—to cover everything. Must be the heavens."

"Is that your guess?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're wrong. The best bet that covers everything is the alphabet."

"Huh! Why didn't I think of that?"

"Now you boys must ask us girls. Fred, go ahead."

"I'll ask you, Polly. Here is a stinger: What's the difference between a brand new ten-cent piece and an old-fashion quarter?"

"The difference is exactly fifteen cents," replied Polly, placidly.

"Wow!" I guess you read the same riddle book I did."

"Here is one for you, Margy," said Artie. "Why is a lollipop like a horse?"

"When he's the same color," said Margy, quickly.

"No, that isn't the answer. A lollipop is like a horse because the more you lick it the faster it goes."

"Now, Ward, you ask the last riddle," said Polly. "Then we'll go on with our Hallowe'en fun."

"Well, Jess, what is the ugliest hood ever brought to light?"

"Ugly hood? Oh, lots of them are ugly. Sadie Drew has a hood that is a sickly green and has bright red——"

"Never mind all that. What is positively the ugliest hood ever thought of?"

"I don't know. What hood is it?"

"A falsehood," cried Ward, triumphantly.

"Oh, well, I guess that's right."

"Now everybody has asked a riddle, let us go on with our Hallowe'en stunts," said Polly. "Let us start on the wishes."

"Everybody make a wish," directed Artie. "Then we'll go upstairs and down and around the summerhouse and the real house. Remember, nobody is to say a word."

They made their wishes hurriedly and silently,

and then, Fred leading the way, they started. They kept rather close together, for each time they went up- and downstairs—and they had to do that twice—their shadows made such queer shapes on the wall that they looked positively spooky.

Artie and Ward clumped along in the giraffe suit, and the leopard and kangaroo looked almost real. Each one wanted to say to some one else, "Oh, doesn't it make you feel jumpy?" but that, of course, would have broken the spell.

When they had been up and down the stairs twice, Fred led the way outdoors. Then, indeed, they did keep close together, for the moon was crossed by scudding clouds and the dry leaves, rattling over the dried grass, made funny, little scratching noises. Polly said afterward that she would not have been surprised to have seen a witch come jumping out at her from behind the summerhouse.

Around the house they trailed, and around the summerhouse, in perfect silence. Back to the house they went and into the brightly lighted kitchen.

"Well!" said Margy, in great relief. "I guess our wishes are coming true. No one said a word."

"I almost did, though," declared Jess. "I nearly yelled. Didn't you see something back of the summerhouse?"

"Oh, Jess, you're getting nervous," said Fred. "There wasn't anything there. We walked all around it."

"It was inside," replied Jess, glancing fearfully over her shoulder.

"There wasn't a thing there—not a thing," insisted Fred. "You imagined it. Come on now, let's go pull up the cabbages and see if we're going to be rich or poor. Then we'll have the eats."

"Jess," whispered Polly, as they streamed out again, headed for the garden patch, "I thought I saw something in the summerhouse, too."

CHAPTER V

TABLES TURNED

JESS and Polly looked over their shoulders as they walked to the garden, which was at one side of the house, but the others marched briskly along. In the summer Mr. Williamson had a flourishing "truck patch," and even now there were some late vegetables still in the ground. The patch was protected from frost, and Fred sometimes boasted of getting cabbage or parsnips "from the garden" as late as Thanksgiving Day.

"Now, how do we do this stunt, Artie?" asked Fred, when they had reached the row of cabbages. "You pull one and show us."

Artie pulled a fine large cabbage and exhibited its roots to the interested audience.

"Lots of dirt on it," he pointed out—indeed, in his zeal, he had loosened perhaps half a peck of earth, most of which clung to the roots—"and that shows I will be very rich some day."

"Maybe Fred will," said Polly, mischievously. "That dirt is from his father's garden."

"It's just a sign," explained Artie, hastily.

Margy stooped and brought up another cabbage, but as she lifted it she shook it carefully and nearly all the dirt fell off.

"There goes your fortune!" cried Jess. "You mustn't shake it, Margy."

"It's too heavy with all that dirt on it," Margy complained.

"Well, if there's a bag of gold at the bottom of this one, it's going to stay right there," announced Polly, tugging at the nearest cabbage.

A shriek from Margy startled her. She let go the cabbage in time to look up and see a tall white figure land in the patch, apparently from the skies. They all saw it at the same instant, and, cabbages forgotten, they rushed madly for the house. Margy was crying wildly, Polly pulled Jess along by the hand, and poor Ward and Artie fell down, but scrambled up again and managed to get over the ground in spite of their costume, which was never designed for a running suit. They reached the back porch, stumbled pell-mell up the steps and into the kitchen. Margy closed the door with a bang that shook the house.

"Oh-oo!" she wept, her teeth chattering. "What was it? What was it?"

"I think—I think it was a ghost," quavered Jess.

"It was a million feet high—almost," said Artie. "Did you see how it was waving its arms?"

"There are no such things as ghosts," declared Polly, firmly. "It couldn't have been a ghost, could it——" She had meant to say, "Could it, Fred?" but at that moment she made an alarming discovery.

Fred wasn't in the kitchen with them!

"Where's Fred?" asked Polly, anxiously. "Didn't he come in? Has any one seen him?"

"The ghost has carried him off!" cried Margy, in alarm. "He's gone! Oh, my, what will Mother say?"

"It wasn't a ghost," said Polly again. "I tell you, there are no ghosts. And if it was a ghost, it couldn't carry Fred off—a ghost can't carry anything."

"You just said there aren't any ghosts," objected Margy.

"Well, I mean if there were ghosts, they couldn't carry any one off," Polly explained.

"Then where is Fred?" asked Artie, quite as though he thought Polly would be able to tell him.

"I don't know," Polly admitted. "You don't suppose he could have fallen down a hole somewhere, do you? I don't remember having seen

him after I saw the ghost—and that was just before I started to pull up the cabbage.”

No one remembered having seen Fred.

“But then,” added Ward, “I couldn’t see anything, really. The flannel slipped down over my eyes and I couldn’t see where I was going, let alone any one else. I don’t know where Fred went.”

“I read once about a man who fell down a canyon and was never seen again,” contributed Artie, helpfully.

“There isn’t any canyon for Fred to fall down,” declared Jess, with some scorn. “I think we ought to go over and get Mr. Williamson, though; perhaps he could find Fred.”

“But if we go outdoors, that ghost—or whatever it is—will grab us,” said Margy, fearfully.

It was what they were all thinking, and no one wanted to be the first to volunteer to go over to the Larue house and summon aid.

Ward looked at Artie. They did not think of themselves as brave, but it really required the strongest kind of courage for them to make the suggestion that Ward presently offered.

“We’ll go out and look all over the garden, Artie and I,” he said. “There’s no use in scaring Mrs. Williamson; we may find Fred and then everything will be all right.”

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"I can come, too, and hold a lantern for you," offered Polly, bravely. "I'd like to do it."

"You needn't come. Girls shouldn't—shouldn't—expose themselves to danger," said Ward, feeling remarkably like a policeman—or as he thought a policeman must feel. "But I'd like a lantern. Where is there one, Margy?"

"Down cellar," said Margy, rolling her eyes.

"I'm afraid to go down cellar," announced Jess, flatly. "Goodness only knows what's down there. It's as dark as pitch."

"We'll all go down," suggested Polly. "You can turn on the light at the head of the stairs, can't you, Margy?"

Most of the houses in River Bend were wired for electricity, and there was a switch at the head of the Williamsons' cellar stairs. Margy pressed the button, but even the flood of light which lit the cellar did not give any of them any great confidence. They went down the steps slowly, and not for anything in the world would they have looked over their shoulders.

Margy found the lantern behind the furnace, and, as they had not brought matches, there was no reason for staying, since to light it they would have to go back to the kitchen. Jess led the way upstairs, and as she gained the top step, she cried out. Fred was just closing the outside door.

"Hello!" he said comfortably. "Where've you all been?"

"Where have you been?" Margy countered. "You scared us pretty near into fits. We thought the ghost had caught you."

"Ward and I were coming out to hunt for you," Artie said, waving the lantern. "We went down cellar to get this."

"Huh, that wasn't a ghost," replied Fred. "If you'd hung around a little, the way I did, you would have found it out pretty quick."

Margy switched off the cellar light and shut the door.

"What was it, if it wasn't a ghost?" she asked.

"Joe Anderson," was Fred's surprising reply. "He thought he'd be smart. You haven't been crying, have you, Margy?"

"Only a little," said Margy, hastily.

"She thought something had happened to you," said Polly. "What did you do, Fred? And weren't you frightened?"

"I was at first," acknowledged Fred. "That white thing came up on us so quietly, it rather took my breath away. But when you all started to shriek and run, I heard Joe Anderson laugh. I'd know his snicker if I heard it in China. So I hid behind the pear tree. I thought I'd get a chance to punch his nose for him."

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"Did you?" chorused Artie and Ward interestedly.

"Well, no, I didn't," said Fred. "He followed you up to the porch steps and then came back, but Albert Holmes came out of the summerhouse—he must have been hiding there with Joe—and they began talking. And they're going to try to play another trick on us in a few minutes. I heard them planning it. They want to wait till we get quieted down from this scare, and then Joe is going to ring the doorbell. He thinks whoever comes to the door will have a fit when they see a giant ghost."

"A giant ghost?" repeated Polly.

"Yes, a giant ghost. Albert is going to sit on Joe's shoulder and that will make the ghost about eight feet high," said Fred. "I wish I could think of something to do that would make them feel cheap."

"Let's go upstairs and pour water out of the window on them when they ring the bell," suggested Jess, excitedly.

Fred shook his head.

"I wonder——" he said slowly. "Yes, I do believe it will work!"

"What will work?" demanded Margy, eagerly.

"What will work, Fred?"

"Well, I'll step into the first half of the giraffe,"

explained Fred, "and Artie can manage the back feet—Ward will get out of breath too quickly to do what I want done. When the bell rings, we'll go out the back door and amble around to the front of the house and just wrap Mr. Ghost lovingly around with that nice, long, rubber-hose neck. That ought to give our friends a thrill. They won't know what has them in the dark."

"Oh, yes," approved Polly. "I think that's a fine plan. Hurry, Ward, and let Fred get into your half; the bell may ring any minute."

Ward would have liked to have guided the giraffe's neck himself, but he knew as well as Fred that excitement took his breath away as quickly as running. Fred had the longer arms, too, and would be able to give a longer reach to the animal's long neck.

Fred had hardly slipped into the flannel casing and drawn it tightly about him and Artie was practicing his best giraffe step, when the bell over the door leading into the front hall rang sharply. Every one jumped, though it was a noise they were expecting.

"Stay right where you are," Fred directed. "If Joe sees you through the curtains or the glass door, he'll be suspicious. Come on, Artie, we'll have to hurry."

He and Artie loped down the back steps and

sped around the side of the house. A cautious look showed Fred a towering ghost standing on the front steps, waiting patiently. Tiptoeing, he and Artie stole up to it and before the ghost knew what was happening, a long slim, tight coil was fastened about it.

"Ow! Help! Take it away!" shrieked Joe Anderson's voice. "Quick, Albert, take it off! Help! Something's got me!"

Albert was sitting on Joe's shoulders, and in his terror and excitement he began to kick wildly, hammering the unfortunate Joe on the face and shoulders unmercifully. Fred couldn't unwind the length of hose—though he tried—because the end was pinioned under one of Albert's arms, and the more the two boys who formed the ghost struggled, the tighter the coils seemed to grow.

"Help! help!" called Joe, beside himself with fear.

"Ow! Joe! Joe! It's choking me!" screamed poor Albert, twisting and turning madly, for his pillow case had slipped too far over his head and he felt as though he was smothering.

The other children had rushed to the door when they heard the racket. Across the street in the Larue house lights were blazing through the windows as the shades were run up, for the noise had reached the grown-ups there.

"Take it off, Fred," called Artie. "Hurry—take it off! I can't see a thing in here."

"It—won't—come—off!" gasped Fred. "Don't you see me pulling?"

He took a step backward, his foot caught one of Artie's, and they went down together, dragging the kicking ghost on top of them. When Mr. Williamson and Mr. Larue and Mr. Marley reached the spot a few minutes later, to their astonishment they saw what looked like a brown and white animal with spots thrashing about on the ground and apparently fitted with dozens of legs and arms.

CHAPTER VI

POLLY'S PROBLEM

As THIS queer animal flopped about, muffled cries and shouts came from it. Dancing around it were four little figures in the wildest state of excitement.

"Here, here, what's all this?" asked Mr. Williamson. "You'll have the whole town here in another minute. What's that on the ground?"

"Fred!" said Margy.

"Artie!" cried Polly.

"Joe Anderson and Albert Holmes," piped out Ward.

"Well, we'll see if we can sort them out," said Mr. Williamson, who seemed to understand.

He grasped a kicking leg and Mr. Marley caught a waving arm. As for Mr. Larue, he took a whole handful of spots, and that proved to be most of Joe Anderson.

As soon as the boys stopped twisting and turning, they found they were not so badly mixed as they had thought. They climbed out of their

wrappings, a little the worse for wear, but not much.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" growled Joe Anderson.

"The hose twisted," explained Fred, with a grin. "Bet you were scared."

"My mother will be as mad—as mad—as anything!" sputtered Albert Holmes. "She told me not to take her sheets and pillow case, and now look at them!"

Alas, for Mrs. Holmes' good sheet and linen pillow case—they were covered with dirt and torn in many places.

"Next time," said Fred, significantly, "don't come to a party you're not invited to."

"I don't think that's called for, Fred," said his father, quietly. "Go on back into the house and have your fun there. If you think you'll be likely to rouse the neighborhood again, one of us will stay, too; otherwise we'd like to go back and finish our own party."

"We'll be all right," declared Fred, hastily, and the others echoed his assurance.

Mr. Williamson waited till he had seen Joe Anderson and Albert well up the street on their way home, and then he and the other two fathers went back to the Larue house.

"Perhaps," said Artie, as the girls and boys

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found themselves in the kitchen again, "we'd better not try any more stunts outdoors."

"Huh, they won't bother us again—you see if they do!" said Fred, but Polly and Margy wouldn't hear of any more trips to the garden.

"Anyway, it's time we had the eats," declared Margy, wisely.

She knew the boys could never resist that suggestion, and, sure enough, as she brought out the plates of sandwiches and doughnuts and the little pumpkin tarts Mrs. Williamson had left for them, no one had to be dragged to the table. There was milk to drink, and afterward they popped corn and buttered and ate it. They were surprised when Mr. and Mrs. Williamson walked in and announced that it was ten o'clock and time for all parties to be over.

"I promised your mothers that you'd come home at once," said Mrs. Williamson, so there was no excuse for lingering.

In school the next day, Albert Holmes was not exactly pleasant—his mother had been much "put out" because of the damage done her linen, and Albert persisted in blaming the Riddle Club members for this damage. Joe Anderson spread the report that Fred had nearly broken his arm. He allowed his listeners to infer that Fred had attacked him, but most of the boys and girls were

too well acquainted with Joe to believe that all the blame could be on one side.

"I'll be glad when it gets real cold," said Carrie Pepper to her chum, Mattie Helms. "I hope we have snow up to the windows of the houses and tons and tons of ice."

"Yes," said Mattie. "I like to go skating, too. But I can't skate very well. My ankles are weak."

"Who said anything about ice skating?" demanded Carrie.

"Well, you were talking about ice," retorted Mattie.

"I was thinking about the Riddle Club," said Carrie. "If it will only get good and cold, they won't be able to have their silly old meetings."

"I don't see why," remarked Mattie, wondering what the weather had to do with club meetings.

"You would, if you'd do some thinking," said her chum. "When it gets too cold to meet in the barn, where'll they go?"

"Oh, around to different houses, I suppose," answered Mattie. "They'll do the way we do."

"Polly Marley won't let 'em," was Carrie's reply to this. "She doesn't like going around to different places to meet. I've often heard her say so. And if they don't meet in the barn, they won't meet anywhere. Then, perhaps, we'll get

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a little peace. I do get so sick," added Carrie, "of hearing about that old Riddle Club."

"So do I," Mattie responded. "You'd think they had the only club in River Bend, to hear 'em talk."

The question of where they should hold their club meetings in cold weather was also puzzling Polly. She knew the answer to the puzzle would have to come from her. Margy would be the first to complain of the discomfort of the cold barn, but the last to suggest another meeting place. Jess was hardy and would cheerfully endure a red nose and cold hands before she would take the trouble to move. As for the boys, they naturally expected Polly to think things over and work plans out, and while they would fall in with her suggestions, it was useless to look to them for ideas.

November came in cold and gray and the month was not six days old before the citizens of River Bend looked out one morning to find feathery flakes floating in the air. Fathers thought of their coal-bins and children of their sleds, but Polly's thoughts flew to the clubroom in the Larue barn. A meeting of the Riddle Club was scheduled for the next day.

"Gee, isn't it cold!" cried Artie as he and Polly started for school.

They met Jess and Ward and the Williamson

twins—as usual—and the bitter cold wind that stung their faces came straight from the river.

"I read where a man said this is going to be the coldest winter we've ever had," related Artie, opening and closing his fingers rapidly in their woolen gloves to keep the blood circulating.

"Well, it's cold enough right now," declared Ward. "Of course, I like snow and skating, but I'd rather have the mornings nice and warm."

Fred laughed.

"You'd fix it up so we'd go to school with steam-heated overcoats and shoes, wouldn't you, Ward?" he teased. "And then, the moment school closed, you'd have a nice glassy hill back right up to the door with a sled on top ready to take you coasting."

Ward admitted that he had something like that in mind.

"What are you thinking about, Polly?" asked Margy, curiously. "You haven't said a word for the last five minutes."

"I'm wondering what we are going to do about the clubroom," answered Polly. "To-morrow it's going to be as cold as ice in the barn. We haven't done a thing about heating it, either, except talk about it."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't have an oil stove," declared Fred, positively. "That

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won't cost much, and we can take turns filling it."

"Daddy says that we can't have any kind of a heater in the barn," said Jess, mournfully. "He says the most careful children in the world could burn a barn down without knowing they were doing it."

"Well, the only thing I see to do, then," said Polly, "is to wrap up extra warm. We can't freeze solid in an hour or two."

"No, but I have a little cold now," objected Margy, "and I don't believe Mother will want me to stay in that cold barn. You can't be too careful when you have a little cold."

"You say you have a cold," declared Fred, with brotherly frankness, "because you want an excuse for borrowing one of Mother's good handkerchiefs and putting her new cologne on it."

Margy looked at him reproachfully, but forebore to argue.

All through the morning session Polly studied the problem of a meeting place. That is, when she was not reciting. She racked her mind to think of somewhere they could go, but without success. As Carrie Pepper had shrewdly said, she was not willing to "meet around" at the houses of the various members. For one thing, Polly knew that this plan usually meant extra work and trouble for the mothers.

"We might not always put everything back in place," reasoned Polly. "And the boys are *so* hard on chairs and furniture. They don't mean to be, but they can't help it. With our own furniture, it doesn't matter, but just suppose Artie should put his feet on those new satin chairs Mrs. Larue just had sent home! And if we had anything to eat, I'd want to run the carpet sweeper over the rug afterward, because I just know there would be crumbs spilled."

Then she was called on to go to the blackboard, and it was twenty minutes before she had a chance to tackle the problem again.

"Oh, dear, it is really trying to snow," said Polly to herself, glancing from the window as she walked back to her seat. "I hoped maybe the sun would come out and make it warmer. I don't see what we're going to do with all our lovely things, if we can't meet in the barn any longer."

Polly meant the treasures the Riddle Club had gathered from various sources, some by dint of wheedling from parents who had furniture stored in attics, some from friends made in camp, and some—best of all—won as trophies.

"What are you going to do about the Riddle Club?" Carrie Pepper asked unexpectedly that noon.

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She and Mattie were walking behind Polly and Jess and Margy.

"Do about it?" repeated Polly, surprised. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, that barn will be like an icebox now," said Carrie. "I was just wondering if you were going to give up having meetings till spring. It might not be such a bad plan—Miss Elliott said the other day that nothing ought to be allowed to interfere with our lessons."

"The Riddle Club doesn't interfere with our lessons," replied Polly, coldly. "We agreed to stay away from meetings if our marks went below the average. Mr. Williamson suggested that. But we have good report cards every time— isn't that so, Jess?"

Jess nodded. Carrie always made her feel tongue-tied.

"Well, our Conundrum Club is going to hold a meeting to-morrow, at Joe Anderson's house," said Carrie. "And his mother is going to give us hot cocoa and whipped cream and cake. We most always have something to eat in cold weather."

Margy looked at Polly as Carrie turned in at her gate.

"Whatever we do, we won't give up our club," said Margy.

"Of course we won't," promised Polly.

Artie had an important appointment with Ward before the afternoon session of school—they each had three cents left over from their hoard carefully saved for the club dues, which Fred was sure to collect the next day—and he went back before Polly. When she reached school, five minutes before the one o'clock bell, her eyes were bright with excitement.

"Something—nice—to—tell—you," she whispered across the room to Margy, as the bell clanged and the pupils took their seats. This year, much to the three girls' delight, Margy had her seat in the same room as Jess and Polly, though they did not recite together in all their classes.

All that afternoon Polly fairly glowed. Her eyes twinkled and nothing could ruffle her good nature, not even missing a fairly easy word in spelling, which Carrie immediately spelled after her.

"Get the boys," she commanded Margy, as they struggled into their coats in the cloakroom. "I have the best news in the world to tell you!"

CHAPTER VII

A POSTPONEMENT

MARGY caught Ward and Artie at the gate of the school yard and Polly herself met Fred as he came down the stairs, his mouth puckered to whistle as soon as he should be safely out of the door. Whistling inside the building was forbidden.

"What is it? What is it?" cried Jess, who had caught the excitement from Margy. "Hurry up, Polly, and tell us."

"Well, you know that room at the back of the house we just had finished this fall?" demanded Polly.

"The one your mother is going to have as another spare room?" asked Jess.

"With painted furniture and a gray and pink rug?" said Margy.

"Yes. Only there isn't going to be any gray and pink rug," answered Polly. "Mother told me this noon. She has talked it over with Daddy, and she wants to wait till spring when he goes off to the Hardware Convention. She'll go with

him and buy the furniture then and get the latest—she said so. And what do you think?”

No one thought. They stared at the sparkling Polly.

“Mother said,” Polly announced with a rush, “that, as long as she wasn’t going to use the room, we could have it for our clubroom this winter!”

“Polly! How perfectly lovely!” squealed Margy, in delight.

“When did she say so?” asked Artie, this being the first time he had heard the news.

“This noon, after you had gone,” Polly told him. “And it’s the nicest room—three windows and a window seat and as warm as toast. The radiator is under the window seat. There isn’t a bit of furniture in it, so we can move our own stuff in. And it’s over the back hall, so it won’t matter if we do make a little noise. No one will hear us.”

“I said last night I wished we had a room we could use,” declared Jess. “But our house is so little we use every single place. In winter Dora doesn’t go home to sleep, and that takes an extra room.”

“My goodness, Jess Larue,” said Polly, “don’t you think you’ve done enough? We’ve had that perfectly fine room in your barn ever since the club was started. We’ll never have as nice a

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place as that, and the minute it is warm we'll move back. But I certainly am glad we can have this room."

"I am, too," declared Fred. "I say three cheers for your mother. Do you suppose we can meet there to-morrow afternoon, Polly?"

"Well, we can, if you're willing to help move this afternoon," said Polly. "I think, if every one will help, we can get everything done in time. If there is one thing I will not stand," she announced firmly, "it is to meet in the room before we get our stuff moved in. I'd rather postpone the meeting."

"Come on," was Fred's reply to this speech. "What are you all standing here for? We've got to move the table and the chairs and all that junk before supper time."

He started to run, and after him ran the other members of the Riddle Club. The pavements were wet from the stray snow flakes which had melted as fast as they fell, and Margy slipped once or twice, but she never complained. She, too, felt that getting to the barn and starting the moving was the most important thing to be considered. At a time like this, mere legs and feet were of little consequence.

They dashed into the three houses, to tell three

mothers that they were home from school, and then dashed out again and made for the barn. As Ward complained, pantingly climbing the loft ladder, they acted as though the barn was on fire and they had to save their furniture from the flames.

"Well, it gets dark so soon that we have to hurry," said Fred. "Hurry up and unlock the door, Ward."

"I haven't the key," answered Ward. "It's in my other pocket."

"You mean the pocket of your other coat," Artie corrected him.

"Well, isn't that my other pocket?" argued Ward. "How could I have the same pocket in my other coat that I have in this one?"

"We don't care about your other pocket or this pocket or which pocket is where," broke in Fred. "Go get the key, Ward. And hurry. It isn't going to be so easy taking this stuff down that ladder as it was to bring it up."

Ward went off to get the key for the padlock, and the others sat down in the old, dry hay to wait for him.

"Why don't we lower the table out of the window?" suggested Artie. "That's the way they took the new safe into the lodge hall; they pulled

it up to the second story on a rope. If you can take something in that way, why can't you take it out?"

"Window's too narrow," Fred objected.

"If you can let it out of a window, what's the matter with lowering it over the loft on a rope?" said Jess, slowly.

"We could! Good for you, Jess!" cried Fred. "I'm not anxious to go down that ladder, let me tell you, with one end of the table and some one else at the other end liable to let the whole thing slip and knock me off. Let's get a rope and let the table down."

As Margy had once disconsolately remarked, if there was one thing that was scarce and hard to find in River Bend, it was a good rope. It was her complaint that there was never anything on hand to serve as a jumping rope, and the boys were always discovering that they had no rope to use when they really needed rope. Mothers guarded their clotheslines jealously, and woe betide the boy or girl who cut it in two, or even chopped a tiny length off. "You'd think a clothesline was made of gold," to quote the exasperated Margy.

"I'll go get a rope," offered Artie. "Dad has some down at the store, and he said I could have it, if I came after it. I'll be back in a jiffy."

"I don't see what Ward calls it, he is doing," said Jess, presently. "Even if he had to stop to get his breath, he's had time to find that key and be back. Perhaps I'd better go down and see if he needs me to help him hunt."

Fred and Margy and Polly waited in the loft till the shadows deepened to such a dark gray that they began to think it must be nearly supper time.

"I don't know what you think," said Fred. "But I know we've waited long enough. I'm going in."

Margy and Polly followed him down the ladder. To the natural shadows of a wintry afternoon, the heavy gray snow clouds had added a deeper tinge, and though it was only a little past four, a light in the sewing-room of the Marley house showed that Polly's mother had found it necessary to have the help of artificial light in finishing her work.

"Let's go over and look at the room," suggested Polly, and the three went in the side door and up the back stairs, which brought them to the room set aside for their use.

"It's fine," commented Fred. "Just fine, Polly. We're mighty lucky to have it. There's room for everything, and that shelf will be just the place to put the loving cup."

Polly was pleased. She had been so delighted

to have the room to offer the Riddle Club that she had taken their pleasure for granted; and now Ward and Jess and Artie were apparently making no effort to help her take possession. However, if the critical Fred approved of the room, it must be all right.

"Hello!" said Mrs. Marley, passing through the hall and seeing them sitting on the window seat. "Why, I thought this was the big afternoon! Where are all the others? And you haven't moved a thing!"

"Ward went to get the key and he didn't come back," explained Polly, dully. "And Artie went down to the store to get some rope, and he hasn't come back, either. And we waited and waited and waited for them."

"Why, Polly dear, didn't you go after them?" asked Mrs. Marley, in surprise. "Of course something has happened. You mustn't be so ready to believe that it's their fault. They're just as much interested in the Riddle Club as you are, dear."

"No, they're not," said Polly. "They like it as long as I'll do all the work and the planning, but they won't do a thing to help."

"And this isn't the first time Ward's gone off and forgotten to come back," declared Margy.

"He always thinks there is plenty of time for everything."

"There they are now," said Mrs. Marley, as the doorbell sounded. "I'll go down and send them up."

Ward and Jess came stamping up the stairs, with Artie following them. He carried a large coil of rope over his arm.

"What you doing up here?" asked Ward. "We went up in the loft and you weren't there. Then we went to Williamson's, and you weren't there, either."

"How are we going to get anything moved, if you don't do anything?" said Jess.

"Do anything!" exploded Margy. "Where've you been all this time? Here it is half-past four, and you talk about us doing something! Where have you been all this time?"

"Is it half-past four?" asked Jess. "Why, Dora was baking cookies and we stayed to watch her a little while. She said we could scrape the bowl, but we didn't wait for that. We hurried back as fast as we could."

Polly said nothing at all. Fred glanced at her uncertainly.

"What happened to you, Artie?" he said.

"Why, nothing," Artie replied. "I went down to the store and got the rope; here it is."

"Did it take you an hour?" asked Fred.

"An hour? I wasn't gone an hour," Artie protested. "All I did was to turn the emery wheel for Mr. Kelper a little while; but it wasn't an hour."

"Come on and let's do the moving," urged Ward. "What are you waiting for? It's almost dark now."

"It's too dark to begin getting things down from the loft," said Polly, quietly. "And, anyway, there's no hurry; we can't have a meeting till after Thanksgiving."

"Why, to-morrow!" said Jess. "It's our day to-morrow, Polly."

"But we won't be moved," Polly pointed out. "We can't get our things in here and in place and have a meeting, too. And if we go over our regular day we have to wait till the next meeting. I said I won't hold a session without everything in order, and I won't."

"Are you mad, Polly?" asked Jess, anxiously. "Perhaps we didn't hurry right back, but we meant to."

"No, I'm not mad," said Polly, calmly. "I'm only telling you that there won't be any meeting to-morrow. We can move to-morrow, if you want to."

"But let's move now, Polly," urged Artie. "I

have the rope and everything. There's lots of time."

"We could start, Polly," said Fred.

"I think Polly is exactly right," declared Margy. "It's almost dark now, and we couldn't see to get up and down the loft ladder. Besides, I nearly froze to death waiting up there for you. It will serve you right to have to wait till after Thanksgiving."

"Well, you'll have to wait, too," Jess retorted.

Polly, usually the gentlest of girls, could, when aroused, be like "a little cake of cement," her father said. If she said that no meeting of the Riddle Club was to be called till after Thanksgiving, the other members knew that no amount of persuasion could make her change her mind. Jess was not exactly easy in her conscience, for she had lingered beyond all reason; and Ward and Artie, too, knew that they had been thoughtless and selfish to keep the rest waiting.

"We'll start to move the first thing after school to-morrow," said Jess. "And I'll bring the key with me, so we'll be sure we have it."

Fred thought wistfully of the lost dues, but he resisted the temptation to speak of them.

CHAPTER VIII

MOVING DAY

As soon as school was out the next day, the Riddle Club members hurried to the Larue barn. True to her promise, Jess produced the key and there was no delay about getting into the club-room.

"Br-rr!" shivered Margy, as the door was opened.

They had not dreamed the room could be so cold. With the window and door both closed, no fresh air could warm the atmosphere, as it did in the barn below where, even though there was no heat, it usually felt several degrees warmer than the outside temperature.

The threatened snowstorm had not come, but the day was raw and cold, and each of the children found a sweater under his or her coat most comfortable. Margy, who perhaps felt the cold more than any of the others, was silently thankful that they would not have to hold another meeting in the hayloft room.

"We'd better take the table first, I think," said Fred. "That's the largest piece of furniture, and if any one gets hurt moving that, we won't miss him so much with the other things."

"Huh?" inquired Ward, anxiously.

"Well, you know yourself that if the loving cup fell over and sprained one of your fingers you wouldn't be any help in moving the table," explained Fred. "But if we let the table fall on you, after it's on the barn floor, and it breaks your leg, there'll still be plenty of us left to lift the loving cup. Don't you see?"

Apparently Ward saw, for he asked no further questions, but helped, at Fred's direction, tie the rope about the table and knot it securely.

"Do we have to take it in the second-story window of the house?" asked Polly, watching the boys as they fastened the rope.

"Oh, we can get it up the stairs all right," Fred assured her. "It's only because the loft ladder is so rickety that we're letting it down this way."

When they came to take the table out through the doorway, a new obstacle arose. The piece of furniture stuck.

"It *must* go through," said Fred, as though that settled it.

"It came through," declared Margy, in quite as positive a tone. "I saw it come through."

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"Well, it won't go through now," said Ward, wiping his red face with his handkerchief. "Try it yourself, if you don't believe me."

Jess giggled a little.

"A table couldn't grow fat, could it?" she suggested. "Maybe that table's gained in weight or something, since we moved it in."

"No, I know what the trouble is," said Polly. "When you brought it up here, it just scraped through the doorway—don't you remember? The boys had to be extra careful not to get their fingers caught, the space was so narrow between the frame and the table."

"But it won't even scrape through now," Artie objected, frowning.

"That's because you have that great rope wrapped around it," said Polly. "It hits the sides of the door frame. You'll have to take it off and push the table through."

Grumbling, the boys set to work to untie the rope. This was not easy, for Ward and Artie had put their best efforts into those knots, and they were fearful and wonderful to behold. Then, too, in the pushing and shoving exerted by the movers, the rope had twisted, so that the knots were hard to get at. Artie finally succeeded in unloosening one and Fred unfastened the other, and they pulled the rope out.

"Now I'll push and you two pull," said Fred, who would not allow the girls to help.

The table stuck again. Fred gave a violent shove. Artie and Ward felt a sharp prod in their ribs, and both went over backward.

"Laugh if you want to," said the indignant Artie, rising and looking reproachfully at the girls, who stood behind Fred. "I don't see anything funny myself. It's a wonder that we don't go through this fool floor."

The floor of the loft was not tight, and in many places the cracks were wide enough for a very thin person's foot. Some parts of the floor were merely of poles laid closely together to hold the hay. When Ward had been a very little boy, he had once fallen between these poles and landed on a pile of hay on the main floor, a much frightened lad.

"We didn't mean to laugh," apologized Polly. "But you looked so funny! You went down together just like two wooden soldiers."

With much pushing and pulling and some scolding from Fred, the table was dragged to the edge of the loft and the rope again tied around it, ready to be lowered.

"What do we tie it to?" asked Fred suddenly. "Haven't got the confidence in your gun that you have, Artie."

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Artie grinned. He had fallen over a bluff in camp the past summer, and a rope tied to his old gun stuck in the ground had proved to be his ladder to safety. But even Artie could not trust his gun to stand the weight of the table.

"We can hold it," said Ward, confidently. "The three of us can do it easily."

"If the rope gets to going, it will skin our hands," Fred warned him.

"Don't stand too near the edge, or you'll be dragged over," said Polly, who was eager to help in some way.

"Dump it over," Artie advised, carelessly. "You can't hurt a heavy table like that."

"Much you know about it," said Fred. "One of these legs is likely to crack off. Well, I suppose, as Ward says, the three of us can hold it."

He dragged the table nearer the edge and took up the rope, standing back about two feet. Ward and Artie, in the order named, took up the rope, standing about the same distance from each other.

"I'll give you the word," said Fred, beginning to move the table nearer and nearer, pushing cautiously with his foot.

Ward felt a stinging sensation in his eye—a grain of dust, most likely. He rubbed frantically, while a cousin of the same mischievous dust atom

flew on to Artie and caused him to sneeze tremendously. As every one will tell you, it is quite impossible to keep your mind on any job and sneeze at the same time. Small wonder that Artie forgot the rope, as Ward had done.

The table teetered a minute over the edge of the loft, then dropped. Fred felt as though his arms were being pulled from the sockets for one brief moment, and then the strain slackened. He looked back. The three girls were holding the rope, their feet braced as they pulled. Ward and Artie stood staring at him.

"Grab that rope!" shouted Fred. "What are you thinking of? Grab hold! Do you want the thing to go bang?"

Ward and Artie "came to" with a jerk and grasped the rope. Fred continued to lower the table gently, paying out the rope carefully, until he felt it touch the barn floor.

"All right!" he said glumly. "And small thanks to you boys. If it hadn't been for the girls, we would have had one smashed table."

Ward and Artie were eager to make up for their lapse, and they offered to carry the table into the house alone.

"We'll get everything downstairs first," Fred decreed. "Then all we'll have to do will be to carry the stuff in."

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"Somebody ought to beat the rug," said Margy. "Mother always beats her rugs when she moves them, even if it's only from one room to another."

No one seemed very anxious to do any rug-beating, though Ward offered to "shake it out of the window."

"A good housekeeper doesn't shake rugs out of the window," said Polly. "I'll clean the rug myself."

"Well, housework is girls' work, anyway," said Ward, placidly.

"I won't clean the rug!" retorted Polly. "Mother has a man come and beat her rugs—so there."

"The rug is clean, so stop fussing," commanded Fred. "We haven't used it much. I'll get a broom and sweep it off and it will be all right."

One by one they carried down the treasures from their clubroom—the silver loving cup; the six chairs; the framed sketch, made by the artist, Miss Perry; Artie's gun; and the radio set. This last was to go in the Larue living-room for the winter. It would not be needed in the clubroom, for Artie had his own set, as did Fred. They left the curtains, because Mrs. Marley had all her windows curtained alike, and the new room al-

ready had ruffled white draperies screening the windows above the window seat.

"I hope Carrie Pepper knows we have a club-room," said Margy, as she helped Polly take down the pennant tacked in place on the loft-room wall.

"She will know it, if she doesn't now," declared Jess. "That girl hears everything, sooner or later."

They could hardly blame Carrie if she learned about the new clubroom, for ten minutes later Mrs. Pepper came out to feed her hens and discovered something unusual going on in the barn.

"What are you doing, Fred Williamson?" she asked Fred, seeing him start, whistling, for the Marley house, two chairs over his back.

"We're moving, Mrs. Pepper," he answered, politely.

"Moving? Where to? Is Mr. Larue moving?" asked Mrs. Pepper, forgetting to sprinkle any more corn.

"No, Mr. Larue isn't moving. The Riddle Club is," Fred explained. "We're going to hold our meetings at the Marleys' till warm weather comes again. You ought to see the dandy room we're going to have!"

"I pity Mrs. Marley with a parcel of young ones racketing over her house," sighed Mrs. Pepper.

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"I suppose she thinks she can keep an eye on you better. But I wouldn't give much for her furniture by spring time."

"We have our own furniture," said Jess, indignantly. She had come up with Fred in time to hear this last remark. "We stay in our own clubroom for meetings, and we don't hurt a thing."

"Here, chick, chick," called Mrs. Pepper, remembering her hungry flock. "No, I don't suppose you intend to do any damage. But the time Carrie had the Conundrum Club at our house, it took me a week to get the place to rights again; and some of the grease spots never did come out of the rug."

Jess opened her mouth to say that the Riddle Club didn't spill grease on any one's carpets, but she thought in time that that might sound as though she were criticizing the Conundrum Club.

"What a nice turkey!" she said instead.

"He will be nice," admitted Mrs. Pepper, "when I get him fattened up, if I ever do. I can't abide a turkey for Thanksgiving that I don't fatten myself. I bought this cheap, because he's so skinny, but I aim to have him as fat as butter by Thanksgiving morning."

Jess went on with the rug she was carrying, but she had to stop on the side steps of the Marley house, for the three boys were getting the

table up the stairs with much noise and some laughter.

"What would they do if they had really to move!" said Polly, joining Jess on the steps. "And to think we'll have to go through with this again in the spring. Did you see Mrs. Pepper's turkey?"

"Yes, she says she's getting it fat," responded Jess, absently. "Say, Polly, has your mother said anything about Thanksgiving yet?"

"No, she hasn't." Polly's reply was prompt. "She hasn't said a word. And last year by this time we knew where we were going, didn't we?"

Unless one of the families was going away over the holiday or had invited relatives, it was the custom of the Marleys, the Larues, and the Williamsons to have Thanksgiving dinner together at one of their homes.

"I think it's kind of queer," said Jess, soberly.

CHAPTER IX

THE SECRET IS OUT

THE boys came panting downstairs, having landed the table in its new home safely. They found Polly and Jess on the steps.

"We're coming right up," said Polly, hastily. "We were just talking about Thanksgiving."

Margy joined them, the loving cup in her arms.

"What about Thanksgiving?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, we were saying how queer it is we haven't heard yet where we're going for dinner," said Polly.

Margy looked at her brother.

"Fred knows something about Thanksgiving he won't tell," she complained. "I think he's awfully mean."

"What do you know, Fred?" wheedled Polly. "Tell us—please."

Fred's face turned a little red.

"I don't believe he knows a thing that we don't," said Ward.

"I do, too!" cried Fred. Then he stopped.

"I think you might tell," said Jess, pensively.

"I promised I wouldn't. Now will you be quiet?" said the harassed Fred.

"Is it about all of us? Are we in it?" asked Margy, quickly.

"How could you be in a Thanksgiving dinner?" asked Fred.

"Don't be silly—you know what I mean. Shall we all know what you know when we do know?" returned Margy.

"I don't know what you're trying to say, but you won't get a word out of me," announced Fred, firmly. "I happened to overhear some talk I wasn't supposed to hear, and then Dad told me all the rest of it and made me promise not to tell."

"Will you tell just one thing?" coaxed Artie.

Fred had a shrewd suspicion that Artie could find out more, if he wished, than the rest of the children.

"Don't you go asking me questions," he ordered. "I said I wasn't going to tell, and that settles it."

"But, Fred, tell us just this one thing," insisted Artie: "When shall we know about—about it?"

"The week before Thanksgiving. Now I hope you're satisfied," Fred retorted. "I don't see any

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reason for standing here talking all day; if we're going to move, why not move?"

Acting on this gentle hint, they went to work again, and before dark the new clubroom was in apple-pie order. Very trim and clean and neat it looked, too, and very warm and cozy it was. Fond as they all were of the little loft room in the barn, they could not deny that it was a bleak place in winter.

Mrs. Marley had given the key to Polly, and had assured her that not an outsider would be allowed over the threshold.

"That means, of course," she told her daughter, "that you'll have to take care of the room. You girls will have to get together and clean it now and then, but a room that isn't used regularly will stay clean a long time. You can dust it thoroughly before each meeting."

Polly loyally passed over the key to Ward, because he had always locked the padlock on the barn-room door. She knew he liked this duty and felt proud to be intrusted with it.

It was fortunate that the Riddle Club knew they were to have news the week before Thanksgiving, because they would have found it hard work waiting. As it was, each time "Thanksgiving" was mentioned in school or at home they looked anxious.

"I do think it is *too* queer," said Jess, for the twentieth time, as she walked home from school with Margy and Polly. "Carrie Pepper's mother is going to have six aunts come to their house to dinner. And we don't know a thing."

As she spoke, they saw Fred come dashing from the house and give the signal that never failed to produce Artie and Ward if they were within hearing distance. It was a piercing whistle produced in some mysterious manner by putting three fingers in one's mouth.

Two ear-splitting blasts answered Fred's whistle, and Artie and Ward shot out of the Larue barn, where they had been engaged in some interesting experiment. Artie always had an experiment or two on hand.

"Hurry up! He wants us," said Polly, as Fred spied them and waved.

The three girls ran the rest of the way and reached the Williamson gate breathless.

"You know Thanksgiving?" said Fred.

They nodded, dumbly.

"Well, we're going up to Tom's Island!" said Fred, who certainly did not believe in wasting words.

"Tom's Island!" echoed Polly. "But it's winter!"

"All the more fun. Wait till you hear," said

Fred. "We're going up in the car Wednesday night and stay over till Sunday. Think of the sport! If the lake is frozen, we can skate or walk on the ice, and maybe we can rig up a sail and have ice boating."

"I'd rather have it snow," said Artie, seriously. "Let's take our sleds."

Margy shivered.

"It will be awfully cold," she complained. "There isn't any heater. How'll we keep from freezing?"

"Oh, we'll run all day and take a hot brick to bed at night," said the practical Jess.

"I think it will be great! Is that your secret, Fred?" asked Polly.

"Yes," admitted Fred.

"You see," he went on, "I was back of the sofa, hunting for my cap, when Mother and Dad came into the parlor and began talking about it. I heard some before I could wriggle out, and then they told me the rest and I promised not to tell. They wanted to get all the plans fixed before they let us know."

"And we're all going? What a lark!" cried Jess. "We never did that before."

"Well, you're all going," said Fred. "But Mr. and Mrs. Larue and Mr. and Mrs. Marley are going to Rye to have dinner with Mr. Field and

his sister and his two cousins—you know, Mr. Kirby and Mr. Adams. Mr. Kirby planned it. He wrote and asked us all to come, every single one of us."

"My goodness, that would have been—two—six—ten of us; no, twelve," said Margy, calculating swiftly.

"That's what Mother said—that twelve was too many," Fred replied. "So she talked it over with the other mothers, and at first, Mother told me, they thought they'd all go and leave us at home. Then they decided that was kind of mean on Thanksgiving, so Mother and Dad offered to take us all to the island. You know Dad likes to be outdoors. Mr. Kirby wrote and said that plan was all right, but Dad and Mother must come to dinner New Year's. He asked them for Christmas, but of course they couldn't go away from home on Christmas."

"Of course not," echoed Polly. "So we're going with your father and mother in the car. I'm so excited, I can hardly wait!"

"I'm glad to know what we're going to do," said Margy, sighing as though a burden had been taken from her shoulders.

"Now don't——" Polly instructed her younger brother, "don't, Artie, whatever you do, tell any one who belongs to the Cōnundrum Club where

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we're going. It would be just like them to want to go, too."

Artie said he would be careful, but it was lucky he had to memorize a verse to recite at the Thanksgiving exercises. Artie loved to talk, and he was apt to talk to any friendly listener.

It was not till the Wednesday morning before Thanksgiving Day that Carrie Pepper heard of the plan. School was to close at noon, and Mr. and Mrs. Larue and Mr. and Mrs. Marley had gone off in the Larue car at seven o'clock that morning. Rye was over the state line and some two hundred miles from River Bend.

"I saw your folks going off," remarked Carrie, sociably, joining the six chums as they set off for school at half-past eight. "What are you going to do for dinner to-morrow?"

"My mother's at home," said Margy, with dignity. "And so is Dad."

"Oh! Then are they all coming to your house?" asked Carrie. "My mother is going to have a lot of company, too. She's going to kill the turkey this afternoon. He's nice and fat, too."

"We're going to carry the turkey with us," said Artie, innocently. That was enough for Carrie.

"Carry it with you?" she asked. "Why, where are you going?"

"Up to Tom's Island," said Fred, darting a severe look at Artie. "We're going up in the car and stay till Sunday."

"I never heard of going to a summer camp in the winter time," declared Carrie. "You'll probably freeze, and it will serve you right."

But the minute she reached school she told Mattie Helms and Joe Anderson, and in less than an hour every girl and boy in the school knew where the Riddle Club intended to spend Thanksgiving.

The six members hurried home as soon as school was dismissed. They were to leave at half-past three, and there was still some packing to be done. Mrs. Williamson had set her heart on taking a full Thanksgiving dinner, and there were enough cooking utensils left at the camp, safely packed in strong, dry boxes, to cook it properly. The last thing Mr. Marley had ordered done before leaving the island in the summer, was to have Mr. Mains bring a load of firewood and stack it under a shelter. He had foreseen that they might wish to visit the camp in winter.

Each member of the club was to take a flannel sleeping bag, a hot water bottle, a pair of blankets, and rubber boots. Even the girls in River Bend owned rubber boots, for they wore them to school during the winter storms. Mr. Williamson said they would be taken for gypsies if any one saw

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the back of the car, for comfortables and blankets were piled high around the suitcases and the one sled that Fred had insisted must go.

"I ought to be thankful, I suppose, that you don't each clamor to take a sled," said Mr. Williamson, good-naturedly. "No, Artie, positively no ice skates allowed. It won't be cold enough for that. It may snow, but even if the lake froze over, it wouldn't be thick enough to bear you so early in the season."

So the skates were left out, and that gave room enough—so Mrs. Williamson always declared—to put the six children in.

Jess and Ward were upstairs, getting into their heavy sweaters, and Mr. Williamson was backing the heavily loaded car out of the garage, when they heard Mrs. Pepper shrieking.

"Catch him! Catch him! There he goes!" they heard her cry.

Then came the sharp tinkle of broken glass.

"What's the matter?" cried Ward, running for the stairs and down them as fast as he could go, Jess at his heels.

Mrs. Pepper met him on the lawn. She presented a terrifying sight, for the shawl, in which she had muffled her head, had slipped over one ear and gave her a reckless look. In her right hand

she carried a hatchet—a “tomahawk” the excited Ward dubbed it—and this she waved fiercely.

“Where’d he go?” she demanded of the frightened children.

“Where’d what go?” stammered Jess, for Ward, as usual, had lost his breath.

“The turkey! I tipped the coop over—I’ve had him shut up for a week to give him the final fattening—and he was off like a streak. He came in this direction. I saw him fly over the hedge.”

“I heard glass breaking,” said Jess, doubtfully, turning to stare at the house.

Down the steps of the Marley house came Polly and Artie, and around from behind the car in front of their house, came Fred and Margy.

“Most ready?” they called. “Mother’s putting her hat on.”

“One of the parlor windows is broken,” said Jess, suddenly. “Do you suppose the turkey did that?”

CHAPTER X

IN CAMP AGAIN

THOUGH Ward was sure a turkey couldn't break a window pane and Fred and Polly and Margy and Artie, who joined them, were doubtful, Mrs. Pepper said that, for her part, she knew the turkey was in the Larue house.

"And you'll just have to help me get him out," said she. "I have company coming to-morrow and I have to get that turkey killed and dressed to-night. Carrie is off with some of her friends—instead of helping me—and Mr. Pepper won't be home till the late boat. I'll pay for the broken glass, of course; but you'll have to help me take that turkey away."

A turkey hunt promised some excitement, and the six children went into the house determined to find the missing bird. Mrs. Pepper implored them not to chase him, when they found him, "for," she said, "I've been feeding him on English walnuts and chocolates for a week, and I don't want him to lose his fat. A scrawny turkey is something I can't abide."

"I feel as though I was hunting for a burglar," Polly whispered to Margy, as they tiptoed through the lower rooms.

"So do I," answered Margy. "Oh! What was that?"

It was nothing but a window shade that had rattled against the pane, blown by the draft which came through the broken window. Dora, the Larue maid, had gone to her own home to stay over the holiday, and there was no one but the searchers in the house.

"Well, he isn't on the first floor," said Fred, when all the rooms had been carefully examined. "Artie and I will go up to the attic and have a look around there. A turkey might feel more at home in an attic."

Mrs. Pepper didn't seem convinced, but she went on with her hunt and Fred and Artie went to the attic. The door opening on the steep stairway was half open, and as Fred jerked it back, something flapped in his face.

Fred was no coward, but he jumped back with a startled cry. A large turkey scuttled up the attic stairs.

"He's up here!" shouted Fred. "Come on—we'll get him! He's up here!"

The other children came running, and Mrs. Pepper toiled after them.

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"Don't chase it," she kept saying. "Don't chase it. You'll run all the fat off it."

"You stay down here, Ward, to head him off," directed Fred. "We'll go up and get him started, and when you hear me telling you to open the door, you do it slowly. We only want to drive him back to the coop."

Ward seemed to understand. He took up his station by the door which Fred closed as he followed the rest up the attic stairs.

"There's Mr. Williamson whistling," said Ward. "I'll bet he's ready to go. He doesn't know where we are."

"I'll go and tell him," promised Mrs. Pepper. "You stay right where you are, Ward. He'll wait for you when he knows you're doing something to help me. I couldn't get that turkey out of the attic alone in a month of Sundays."

Mrs. Pepper hurried off. She was short and stout, and Ward had to admit that she would have found turkey-chasing hard work with no younger feet and hands to help her.

Ward, listening at the door, heard the sound of quick footsteps over his head, a shout from Fred and a burst of laughter from Artie. Then the footsteps began to run, and Ward guessed correctly that they were chasing the turkey over

the attic floor. Margy gave an excited shriek, and then an avalanche seemed to be coming down the uncarpeted stairs.

"Open the door!" called Fred. "Open it, quick!"

Ward was so excited that he forgot to open the door slowly. He flung it back with a jerk and an angry and frightened turkey spread its wings and sailed over his head, while Fred, stumbling, fell over Artie and the two boys and Jess came down in a heap on the protesting Ward.

"Catch him!" cried Polly, from the top of the stairs. "He's going downstairs again. Catch him!"

In a moment the three boys and Jess were on their feet, and, joined by Margy and Polly, they rushed pell-mell down the front stairs. The door in the hall was open and Mrs. Pepper stood talking to Mr. Williamson on the porch. The grown-ups caught a glimpse of a flying brown body and then a colorful flash as six gay-colored sweaters dashed past them. Then the chase headed for the Pepper yard.

"Corn!" cried Mrs. Pepper. "Show him some corn and he'll walk into the chicken house."

Polly dashed around to the chicken house and caught up a measure of corn lying on a grain bin.

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She ran out into the yard and shook this invitingly. Dozens of hens gathered around her, and, sure enough, the fugitive came, too.

Careful not to spill a grain, Polly walked backward into the chicken house, and the moment the gobbler stepped over the sill, she scattered the corn with a lavish hand. As his long neck bent to eat the grains, Polly slipped out and bolted the door.

They were half an hour late in starting, but the richer by an extra fruit cake Mrs. Pepper pressed upon them.

The drive to Lake Bassing was made in good time. It was a cold day, but tucked in the tonneau with the robes, the girls and boys were warm and comfortable.

Lake Bassing, in the winter, was a very different town from the one they had known in the summer season. Some of the houses were closed, and there was no cheerful Dick Hare and his bus to greet them. Mr. Williamson did not stop in town, but drove straight to the bridge that led to Tom's Island.

"It feels like snow," he explained, as he helped them out, "and we want to get settled in camp before it is pitch dark. What's the matter, Polly? Stiff?"

Polly was a little cramped and cold from sit-

ting still so long, but as soon as she got down and began to walk, she was all right. They all helped to carry the things across the bridge, and then Fred and his father ran the car down to the Meade farm, where they were to keep it in the farmer's garage.

By the time they had walked back to the island, Mrs. Williamson had a fire built in the kitchen stove and one in the funny little wood stove that had been set up in the mess-house. The girls were spreading the blankets on the cots, and Artie and Ward, having brought in wood, were pumping two pails of fresh water.

They were all so sleepy that they decided to tumble into bed and forego the campfire that night. With the hot water bottles, which Mrs. Williamson filled from the teakettle, and the sleeping bags and blankets, they were as comfortable as could be, when tucked in, and were asleep almost before they had finished saying "good night."

Artie was the first to wake in the morning. He opened one eye, glanced around, trying to remember where he was, and then, happening to see through the open end of the tent, he shrieked in delight.

"Fred! Ward! Wake up! It snowed!" he cried.

That roused the camp, and the six chums

dressed in such haste it is doubtful if they missed the steam heat of their bedrooms at home. The girls came out of their tent at the same moment the boys stepped from theirs, and a royal snowball fight was on before breakfast.

"Could you consider an armistice—for flap-jacks?" called Mr. Williamson, from the door of the kitchen lean-to.

Could they? You might have thought they had never had anything to eat since the summer before, to see them at that breakfast table. Mrs. Williamson insisted on baking cakes till no one could eat a morsel more, and then the boys made her sit down, while Polly, under her directions, mixed more batter and baked a fresh and hot supply for the jolly cook. The three boys took turns carrying them in, and Mrs. Williamson said she felt as a queen must feel with some one to wait on her.

After breakfast there was the dinner to be considered. Mrs. Williamson had done nearly everything at home the day before, and after more wood and water had been brought in and Polly and Margy had set the table with a clean cloth and the pretty favors Mr. Marley had given them in a box before he left, the children were told to go off and coast till they were called.

"I'll ring the old cowbell as a signal," said Mrs.

Williamson, pointing to an old bell that hung on a nail in the kitchen.

Mr. Williamson stayed with her, and the rest went off with Fred's sled to find a good coasting hill.

"We can't go off the island, or we won't hear the bell," said Polly.

Artie was for coasting down the bluff he had fallen over. "That," he remarked, engagingly, "would be even more exciting."

"Yes, and when you landed in that cold water, I guess you'd find it exciting," observed Fred. "We couldn't pull you out with a rope, either, because you'd drown before we could get a rope."

However, it was not necessary to go over the bluff, for they found that the gradual ascent to it formed a hill that was steep enough to offer good coasting. Taking turns with the sled, they coasted to their hearts' content, and when the cowbell called them to dinner they brought rosy cheeks and huge appetites to the table.

The turkey was the brownest, the cranberry jelly the reddest, that they had ever seen. And they were allowed both kinds of pie—mince and pumpkin—because Mr. Williamson said that playing outdoors so much would keep them from getting ill, no matter how much dinner they ate. Wasn't that an understanding remark? As

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Artie said, it just showed you what kind of a man Mr. Williamson was!

There was a long hill back of the Meade farmhouse, and here Mr. Williamson took them all that afternoon. It was the kind of hill that took your breath away, going down it on a sled, long and steep and with a dip in the middle that made your heart come up in your mouth, so Margy said. The girls couldn't help screaming each time they went down, but they wouldn't have stayed away for the world.

When it was too dark to coast any longer, they went back to camp and the boys built a huge bonfire. They had cocoa, steaming hot, in their tin cups and had turkey sandwiches and ate outdoors, grouped around the fire "just like explorers," Artie said.

"The nicest Thanksgiving I ever had," said Ward, sleepily, getting into his flannel bag that night.

And Artie echoed him, more sleepily still.

Perhaps it was the snow that made Artie dream of Christmas. At any rate, he sat up in bed the next morning and shouted across to Fred that he heard sleighbells.

"Go to sleep," said Fred, drowsily. "You're dreaming."

"I do, too, hear 'em!" Artie insisted. "There,

Fred Williamson! I guess you'll believe me now!"

"Hello! Hello!" bellowed a hearty voice, and sleighbells crashed as the voice shouted "Whoa!"

"It isn't Christmas," Fred heard Artie mutter to himself, and that sent the older boy into fits of laughter.

"You bet it isn't Christmas," Fred declared, and not for anything in the world would he have admitted that the same thought had crossed his mind—a picture of gay and gallant Santa Claus, clad in a jolly red suit, driving his reindeer over the snow.

Ward, who didn't mind the cold, had hopped out of his cot and was leaping, like an antelope, toward the tent door, his sleeping bag a decided handicap.

"It's Mr. Meade," he reported, after a brief look. "He's got two horses harnessed to a long bobsled—at least it looks like a bobsled. Mr. Williamson is down talking to him. Hurry and get dressed!"

CHAPTER XI

ARTIE'S ADVENTURE

THE way those boys shot into their clothes would have been a revelation to their mothers, who sometimes had to call them three times before they came down to breakfast on a school morning. In less than five minutes they were down at the bridge and across it.

"Morning!" said Mr. Meade, heartily. "Thought you'd be up. I'm going up in the woods to cut logs, and I says to my wife, 'If those children haven't been up in the woods in a deep snow, they might like the trip.' "

"They haven't had breakfast yet," said Mr. Williamson, smiling.

"I'll wait," returned Mr. Meade. "Winter time we can wait and be neighborly, but, I declare, in the summer I don't have a moment to spare to go to a wedding!"

He tied his horses and went back to the camp where Mrs. Williamson and the girls had breakfast ready. They insisted he must eat with them,

and as he had had the first meal by lamp-light, he was able to eat a second breakfast comfortably.

"Mother packed us a lunch, so you don't have to bother," he told Mrs. Williamson, and, sure enough, there was a large basket under the seat of the sleigh.

What a trip that was—along snow-covered roads, the sleighbells ringing and the children singing in tune to the bells. They met few teams and they each took turns driving the steady pair of farm horses whose flying feet seemed to skim the white roadway.

"How awfully still it is!" said Margy, when they turned into the narrow trail that led through the woods.

It was still and it was beautiful—a mantle of spotless snow over the ground and every little twig and bush draped in white. There were the tracks of little wood creatures between some of the trees, and a squirrel dived into a stump as Fred came suddenly upon it.

"Are you going to chop Christmas trees?" asked Artie, who couldn't get away from the idea of Christmas.

"No, I'm going to haul down wood to be chopped up. That's my main winter work," Mr. Meade explained.

The logs had been cut earlier in the year, and

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the sled had to be driven slowly through the woods, stopping at each pile of timber which Mr. Meade loaded on. Fred was allowed to drive and very proud he felt. He had intended to have a boat on the river when he grew up, but now he felt that he might like to be a farmer and "get the wood out" in the depth of winter.

When the sled was fairly well loaded, Mr. Meade built a fire and they sat around it to eat their lunch. The horses had feed-bags and ate placidly, apparently not affected by the cold.

Lunch over, the fire was carefully put out, every trace of it buried deep under the snow, and they drove on. They stopped to get two more piles of logs, and then drove out without turning.

"It's a longer way around, but the road's pretty," said Mr. Meade, who seemed to be having as good a time as any of the children.

The six sat perched up on the logs—having solemnly promised not to fall off—and pretended they were explorers going through a new country.

"I wonder if it snowed in River Bend," said Ward.

"Probably not," Mr. Meade answered. "Your town is kind of protected, and you don't get near the sweep of weather we do. It's always from three to five degrees colder up here at the lake than it is down with you."

Polly looked around suddenly at Ward.

"I thought Artie was sitting next to you," she said.

"He—why, he *was*!" cried Ward. "He must have fallen off! Mr. Meade! Oh, Mr. Meade!"

The farmer looked up calmly. He was sitting down under the logs, which projected beyond his head.

"Well?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Artie Marley!" gasped Ward. "He's fallen off."

Mr. Meade reined in his team and stood up, his eyes searching the road which they had just come over. The children stood up, too, and tried to see, but there was nothing but an unbroken expanse of whiteness.

"I don't see how he could fall off without saying a word," observed Mr. Meade. "But if he isn't here, he must be somewhere else. Hang on now, because I'm going to make the turn—if I can," he added.

He tried, but the long, loaded sled wouldn't swing easily, and it couldn't be backed as a wagon could. Then, too, the farmer was afraid the load might shift, and he couldn't risk overturning five children and having a pile of heavy logs fall on top of them.

"Can't make it," he said, when he had pulled the front runners around so that the road was blocked. "Some one will have to go back and hunt for him. I don't dare leave you alone with the team, or I'd go. I think you two boys will be the ones. Don't go off the road, and if you need help, shout and I'll hear you."

"We'll all go," said the anxious Polly. "Perhaps he's buried in a drift and can't get out."

"There are no bad drifts," Mr. Meade assured her. "It snowed nearly all night, but there wasn't any wind. I wouldn't say there was enough snow to even cover a boy, let alone bury him."

The five children set off over the road they had just traveled, to search for the missing Artie. It seemed a very lonely road, now that they were walking on it, instead of being mounted high on a pile of wood.

"I don't know what Mother will say if we come back without Artie," worried Margy. "I must say, Ward, I think you ought to have been watching him."

"Oh, Margy, Ward isn't to blame," protested Polly. "Artie always takes care of himself. I think a branch of a tree has swept him off. He's so thin, and if he happened to be thinking about something else, he'd forget to hold fast, as Mr. Meade told us to do."

Fred looked back. A turn in the road had already hidden the sleigh from sight.

"I don't believe he is hurt a bit," said Jess stoutly. "Artie doesn't get hurt easily. Remember the time he fell off the bluff?"

"He's always falling off some place," declared Fred, gloomily. "I never saw such a boy for mooning around when he ought to be paying attention."

Artie was rather given to meditation at the wrong time, none of them could deny that. In school he often chose a recitation period in which to think, and as he seldom thought about the lesson which was being recited, he had often been marked "zero" for questions to which he really knew the answers.

"Well, we just have to find him," said Polly. "That's all there is to that. A boy can't disappear off the face of the earth."

But by the time they had tramped along for the length of another turn, they began to think that almost anything could happen to a boy. There was no sign of Artie anywhere, and no trace that might suggest what had become of him.

"Listen!" said Fred suddenly, holding up his hand.

A twig cracked under Ward's foot and Fred frowned.

"Do be still, can't you?" he asked quickly.

Jess sneezed at this point. Perhaps you've noticed that when one is trying to have perfect silence, a flood of little noises seems to be let free.

"Excuse me," said Jess, politely. "I didn't mean to."

"Oh, for pity's sake!" cried the exasperated Fred. "Can't you listen a minute? I thought I heard something."

They listened intently.

"Hallo! Hal-lo!" came a call. "Come—back. Come—back!"

"That's Mr. Meade," said Fred. "Come on, we have to go back."

"But we haven't found Artie," protested Polly, ready to cry.

"Got to go back and see what he says," said Fred, firmly. "Come on. Perhaps he has found Artie."

Polly didn't see how this could possibly be, but she followed the rest as they turned. Fred tried to run a little, but they had walked fast, and Ward, especially, had no extra breath to expend, even in a dog-trot.

"How could he find Artie, when he fell off back here somewhere?" asked Jess of Polly, slipping along the glassy depressions left by sleigh runners.

"He couldn't," Margy answered before Polly

could. "I never heard of such a silly idea in my life!" she added.

"All right—silly idea, is it?" said Fred. "Then who's that?"

He pointed up the road, and Polly gasped while Ward's mouth opened and stayed that way from sheer surprise.

Coming toward them, waving his hands and evidently most pleased to see them, was the missing Artie!

"Artie Marley! where were you?" cried Polly, while he was still two yards away.

"Did you think I was lost?" beamed Artie, in reply.

"We didn't think anything about it," said Fred, grimly. "You weren't on that load, so we knew you'd fallen off. But where did you tumble?"

"I didn't," said Artie, walking back with them—they had rounded the second turn by now and could see Mr. Meade waiting with the team. "I didn't fall off," declared Artie, earnestly.

"Next, I suppose, you'll say you were sitting next to me all the time," said Ward, suspiciously.

"No, I was down in that hole where the lunch basket is," explained Artie. "My feet got cold and I climbed down there and—and I went to sleep, I guess."

And that was all the mystery of his disappear-

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ance. He had crawled into the hole left in the center of the wood pile, made comfortable by heavy horse blankets, and had promptly gone to sleep. When the sleigh stopped he had wakened and had amazed the waiting Mr. Meade by crawling out behind him and asking where the "other children" were.

The rest of the way home Mr. Meade insisted on turning every few miles and solemnly counting the boys and girls to make sure there were six of them. And when he set them down at the island bridge, before he would let them thank him for the happy day, he carefully counted them and "added them to make six," as he said. He didn't intend to spill any more of them out or have another one go to sleep and be counted missing.

The next day the Riddle Club campers went home, to be ready for school on Monday morning. Ready for something else that was important, too.

"Our first meeting in the new clubroom," said Polly, happily. "Monday afternoon, as soon as school is out! Won't it be fun!"

CHAPTER XII

THE RIDDLE CLUB MEETS

ALTHOUGH Polly had been so eager when she spoke of the meeting, she was the last one to come to the clubroom after school the next afternoon.

She looked flushed and excited, and, without knowing why, the others felt a little thrill of excitement, too.

Polly called the meeting to order and asked for unfinished business. There was none.

"New business?" she asked.

Fred rose, the bank prominently displayed in his hand.

"The treasurer," he announced, rattling the "treasure" cheerfully, "would like to remind you that the dues are due."

"Oh, for pity's sake," grumbled Ward. "It's too soon after Thanksgiving. No one has any money this time of year."

Fred gave him an exasperated glance.

"I only wish," he said coldly, "that you'd let me know the time of year you want to pay your dues. In summer you say you need the money for

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ice-cream and in winter you need it for—for—
icicles, I suppose!"

Ward giggled and Margy sighed.

"Now they'll argue over that for half an hour,"
she whispered to Polly.

But Fred was in no mood for argument. He felt that he had a duty to perform and he intended to perform it, whether or not his friends enjoyed the performance.

"If you think I enjoy prying you loose from ten cents, Ward Larue," said Fred, "or you either, Artie Marley, you're mistaken. But as long as we have a club and a treasurer and I'm the treasurer, you're going to pay your dues and pay 'em at the right time."

"I guess you can't collect the money if I haven't got it," retorted Ward.

"Then you'll lose your standing," said Fred, making a wild guess at the "by-laws." The Riddle Club had never bothered much with by-laws.

But Polly thought it time to interfere.

"I think you boys are too silly for words," she pronounced. "Of course Fred has to collect the dues—that's his work. But you know, Fred, that if you didn't pitch into Ward, he'd hand you the ten cents without coaxing. Why you want to argue and get cross is more than I can understand."

Ward scowled and Fred laughed good-naturedly.

"There's the bank," he said. "You can put your money in it or leave it alone. But let me tell you, no club lasts very long without dues."

"We haven't spent a cent yet," grumbled Ward, but he slipped his dime into the bank in something like haste.

The other dimes tinkled merrily after, and the sound was music in Fred's ears. Whatever he chose to do, he did with all his might, and the matter of club dues was a serious matter with him.

"What are we going to spend the money for?" asked Artie, to whom, like Ward, the bank seemed to hold a fortune.

"We're not going to spend it for anything," Polly informed him, "till we need something very much."

"We could buy Christmas presents with it," suggested Artie, wistfully.

"Artie Marley, I'm surprised!" said Polly. "That money doesn't belong to us any more. It is club money, and has to be spent for the good of the club. Don't you understand?"

"Well, I'm glad," remarked Artie, "that the dues aren't more than ten cents."

Fred was ready with a retort, but Polly forestalled him.

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"Is there any other business before the club?" she asked quickly.

Apparently there was not.

"Let's begin and ask riddles, then," said Margy.

"I have something to tell, first," announced Polly. "Wait a minute."

From her blouse pocket she took six tiny boxes, each wrapped in white paper and fastened with an elastic band.

"What in the world——" began Margy, but Jess said:

"Sh!"

"There's one apiece," said Polly, her voice trembling a little with eagerness. "Your names are written on the boxes. Here, Margy."

She handed Margy one of the boxes and, in rapid succession, Jess, Fred, Ward and Artie received theirs. One was left for Polly.

"Do we open them?" asked Jess, and at Polly's nod six pairs of hands went to work.

"Gee!" said Artie simply, when he had opened his box.

The contents were the same. In each box, on a bed of pink cotton, lay a shining pin. Dark blue enamel with a tiny "question mark" inlaid in gold. Margy turned hers over. On the back "Margy Williamson" was engraved.



"YOU ARE GOING TO PAY YOUR DUES."
The Riddle Club Through the Holidays.

"And our names on the back!" said Jess, in a tone of awe, turning her pin over.

"Did Mr. Kirby send them?" asked Fred.

"He gave them to Mother to bring back with her," explained Polly. "Aren't they lovely? I never saw such a darling pin!"

"And there isn't another like it, anywhere!" murmured Margy. "We can wear them to school to-morrow."

"Don't we have to thank Mr. Kirby, or something?" asked Artie, seriously, and though they laughed at him, they knew what he meant.

"I can write a letter," said Polly, "and we'll all sign it."

And a day or two later a "round robin" letter went to Rye, signed by each member of the Riddle Club, a letter that left no doubt in Mr. Kirby's mind as to the pleasure his pins had given the lucky boys and girls who received them.

"Now," said Polly, when the pins were fastened in a conspicuous place on each blouse or coat, "we can have our riddles."

"I've got a riddle for Fred," announced Ward: "How much money does the moon represent?"

"Huh, that's easy," retorted Fred, confidently. "Quarters, of course."

"That isn't how much," said Ward.

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"Well, give me time to think and I'll tell you," answered Fred. "The moon has four quarters—and four quarters—four quarters make a dollar. Ah-ha, Mr. Larue, the moon represents a dollar."

Ward was divided between admiration for Fred's mathematical abilities and chagrin that he had solved the riddle. The former won.

"You did get it," he said generously. "You certainly are good at guessing riddles, Fred."

Fred was determined to show that he could be generous, too.

"I took two guesses," he said, "and that really isn't fair. I think only one guess should be allowed."

"I think so, too," decided Polly. "If each one takes two or three guesses, we use up the afternoon arguing."

Artie's easy giggle hinted that he rather enjoyed the argument, but Margy and Jess were loudly in favor of the single guess.

"Your turn now, Margy," said Polly.

"Why is your nose in the middle of your face, Ward?" asked Margy, with startling suddenness.

Ward had been day-dreaming, and the question caught him unprepared. For the moment he forgot that they were solving riddles.

"Where else would my nose be?" he demanded.

"That's a riddle," Margy explained, laughing. "Why is your nose in the center of your face?"

Polly choked and turned it into a cough.

Ward felt of his nose thoughtfully.

"It's in the middle of your face," said Margy, hastily. "Why?"

"You don't have to keep telling me," Ward announced, with dignity. "I heard you. My nose is in the middle of my face because—because a nose knows where it ought to be."

"Not bad," said Fred.

"I told you the answer myself, and Polly nearly gave it away by laughing," said Margy. "The reason your nose is in the middle of your face, Ward, is because it is the scenter."

"The center of what?" asked the suspicious Ward.

"The center is the middle—that's one kind," said Margy, patiently. "And then it's the scenter—your nose is—because you use it to smell with."

Ward considered this in silence for a few moments.

"Well, maybe," he admitted reluctantly.

"There's no maybe about it," said Margy. "Are you going to pay a forfeit?"

"I don't mind," said Ward.

"Then I'd like three of the stuffed dates you have in your pocket," announced Margy, calmly.

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"Your nose is a good scenter," Fred told her. "How did you know Ward had stuffed dates with him?"

"Because I saw him eating one," said the calm Margy.

Ward had the grace to blush a little, and, jerking the box from a pocket already stuffed to the bursting point, he silently passed it to Margy. She opened it, took out three dates and gave it back to him.

"One apiece," she said, handing a date to Polly, another to Jess, and popping the third into her own mouth.

There were three dates left, by good luck, and Ward distributed these to Artie and Fred and peace reigned again.

"Your turn, Artie," said Polly, who wanted to laugh, but decided that Margy didn't.

"Mine's about a nose, too," said Artie. "Jess, what have noses but smell not?"

"Teapots," said Jess, with a beaming smile.

Artie looked disappointed.

"Bet you can't guess this, Polly," said Fred: "What is that which we often return but never borrow?"

"Why, Fred Williamson, that's my own pet riddle," protested Polly. "I was saving it up to ask you."

"What don't you borrow?" asked Jess, curiously.

"Thanks," said Polly.

"What for? I didn't do anything," replied Jess, bewildered.

"That's the answer to the riddle," said Polly, merrily.

"I want to ask Margy a riddle," Jess said. "What word will, if you take away the first letter, make you sick?"

"You always pick out riddles with arithmetic in them," Margy complained. "And I can't spell long words, either."

"This isn't a long word," Jess encouraged her. "It's a short one."

"Wait a minute," said Polly, rising. "Some one is knocking on the door."

"Is it mince pie?" asked Margy, in a desperate effort to give the answer before she should be interrupted. "Is it mince pie, Jess?"

"It certainly is not!" said Jess, and at that moment Polly flung the door open and visitors appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER XIII

FRED WILLIAMSON, BANKER

MRS. MARLEY, Mrs. Larue and Mrs. Williamson stood in the doorway. It was Mrs. Marley who asked:

"May we come in?"

Fred and Artie brought chairs and Ward scrambled over on the window seat, leaving his place vacant.

"We thought the meeting would be over," said Mrs. Marley. "And we wanted to see how you looked in your new quarters. But don't let us interrupt. I don't believe you've adjourned."

"We have only a couple more riddles to ask," said Polly. "That won't take long."

"The meeting would have been over," Margy explained, "only it took Fred so long to argue about the dues."

Mrs. Marley laughed and glanced at the other two mothers.

"My sympathy is with Fred," Mrs. Larue declared. "I've been treasurer, Fred, and I know

what it is to have to send bills out three times for one collection. If I had to go and ask verbally for the money—well, I don't believe there would be much money collected in our organization."

"Oh, we always pay our dues," said Ward, easily.

"Yes, you pay 'em—after I've made myself hoarse asking you," Fred exploded.

"Dear me, I think we'd better go on with the meeting," said Polly, wishing that Margy had never mentioned the subject of dues.

"All right—I'm ready," announced Jess. "I asked Margy a riddle: 'What word will, if you take away the first letter, make you sick? But Margy used up her first guess—she thought it was mince pie.'"

"I didn't really think it was mince pie," explained Margy, carefully. "I just said that because I was in a hurry."

"Then do you want another guess?" asked Polly. "She may have another one, Jess, the knocking at the door *did* hurry her."

Jess was willing, so Margy tried again.

"If I could spell, I wouldn't mind," said Margy, after thinking deeply for a moment. "Is the word pill?"

Most of the Riddle Club members thought Margy had guessed it. Polly knew the answer,

but the boys were sure Margy had the right word. They were surprised to see Jess shake her head.

"But if you're ill you're sick," Margy argued. "Why isn't that right, Jess?"

"Because," said Jess, "the word is music. Take away the first letter, and you have U-sick. Don't you see?"

"Oh, well, I call that a foolish riddle," sighed poor Margy. "But I'll pay a forfeit. What shall it be, Jess?"

"You don't have to pay much of a forfeit," Jess assured her. "You almost had the riddle, so I'll give you an easy one to pay—nothing to redeem. The red beads, please."

Margy and Polly laughed. The string of red beads Margy was wearing belonged to Jess, and she was merely taking her own property as a forfeit.

"Now I'll ask Artie," Polly said, when the beads had changed hands. "Then we can adjourn the meeting."

"Artie," she said quickly, "on what side of the pitcher is the handle?"

Artie sat in perfect silence for what seemed a long time. No one moved, so fearful were they of disturbing his train of thought. It must have been three minutes—and a long three minutes it was—before he spoke.

"The outside," said Artie, sweetly.

He looked around, and his irrepressible grin broke out. In a minute Ward was on top of him, and they were rolling joyously about on the window seat.

"You knew it all the time!" Ward accused his chum. "You sat there like a chump, just pretending."

Artie did not deny the charge. His twinkling blue eyes spoke for him and he was distinctly pleased with his joke that had kept a roomful of people silent for three minutes or so.

"Sit up and behave," President Polly commanded sternly. "Is there any other riddle to be asked? No? Some one make the motion to adjourn."

Fred made the motion, Jess seconded it, and the meeting was over.

Mrs. Williamson looked smilingly at Polly.

"Perhaps I should have spoken of this before your meeting was over," she said. "But to tell you the truth, I've only just now remembered it. Mr. Williamson would like to offer another riddle with a prize for the answer."

The Riddle Club had had these prize riddles before. It was always fun to try to get the answer, and the prize was always worth while.

"If you'll write it down, Polly," suggested Mrs.

Williamson, "I'll give it to you now. The answers are to be read at your next regular meeting and the prize will be five dollars."

Mrs. Marley whispered to her.

"Oh, yes, I forgot to say that the prize is to go to the Riddle Club bank—not to an individual," said Mrs. Williamson.

Fred rattled the bank and its contents in delight.

"Gee," he said, in heart-felt delight, "that's great!"

To be sure, the prizes the various children had won before this had always gone into the Riddle Club bank, but this was the first time the prize had been offered directly for the bank.

"I don't see what good that money is going to do us," said Ward now. "Fred will never let us spend a cent."

"If we'd spent it every time you wanted to, there wouldn't be a cent left in there to-day," declared Fred, with truth on his side.

"Don't bicker," Mrs. Marley warned them. "Better take down the riddle, Polly. And whatever you do, don't argue over the five dollars before it is won; none of you may be able to guess Mr. Williamson's puzzle."

Polly took her pencil and paper and Mrs. Williamson pulled a little book from her knitting bag.

"This is the riddle, Polly," she said. "Stop me, if I read too fast."

Then slowly and carefully, she read aloud, while Polly wrote it down:

"Why do pianos bear the noblest characters?"

"Go on," said Polly. "I have that."

"That's the entire riddle," Mrs. Williamson answered. "There is no more."

The members of the Riddle Club stared. The other prize riddles had been complicated ones, some rhymed, all contained more words. This sounded so simple that it must be a mistake.

"But that's such an easy riddle!" said Ward, unguardedly. "Most any one can guess that."

"Go ahead, Ward," Mrs. Williamson encouraged him. "Guess it and win the five dollars for the club."

"Pianos bear the noblest characters," recited Ward, with confidence, "because—because—because—well, of course, I'd have to think about it," he ended lamely. "But I don't believe it's hard."

Mrs. Williamson laughed.

"I don't know the answer myself," she told them, "but I do know Mr. Williamson. And something tells me he hasn't chosen a very easy riddle for you to guess. However, you may succeed in surprising him."

Then Mrs. Larue said she had something to tell.

"I've been admiring your lovely clubroom ever since I came in," she said pleasantly, "and I can't see that you need a single thing more than you have. But before I came away this afternoon, Mr. Larue gave me a silver dollar to spend as his contribution for the club. He thought I would put another dollar with it and buy something nice for your clubroom."

"And I have two silver dollars I was commissioned to spend in the same way," added Mrs. Williamson.

Mrs. Marley said she had the same amount in her purse.

"Of course, we wouldn't dream of buying without first coming to see your clubroom," she told the children; "and now we've seen it, the problem is worse than ever. You really have as much furniture as would be comfortable, and your decorations mean far more than any you could buy."

"Don't you think it would be a good plan," asked Mrs. Larue, gently, "to put the six dollars in the bank, along with the club dues? Then, any time you wished to spend it, it would be waiting for you."

The Riddle Club accepted this plan with enthusiasm. They were even able to understand

something of Fred's pride in the bank as the six shining round silver dollars slipped into the slip at the side and rang merrily against the other coins.

"We're really getting wealthy," said Margy, soberly.

Fred was so proud of the bank and the money in it that he was reluctant to leave it long enough to go downstairs at Mrs. Marley's invitation, where hot chocolate and little sweet cakes were awaiting them as Mrs. Marley's treat.

"Don't lock the door, Ward," Fred said, as they went downstairs. "I'll come back and get the bank."

Fred kept the bank in his own room, and usually he buried it under a pile of magazines in his clothes closet.

Margy's seat in the dining-room was near the window, and, happening to glance out, she saw something that made her forget even the cake with the walnut in the center, which she had coveted when they first sat down.

"It's snowing!" she cried. "Look—real snow!"

It really was snowing. River Bend had not had the snowstorm which covered Lake Bassing with a white blanket over Thanksgiving Day, and their schoolmates had listened enviously when they heard of the fun the Riddle Club had had in

camp. The snow now falling was the first of the winter for the little town.

"Well, I suppose winter has really set in," sighed Mrs. Marley. "You children will be glad to see the snow, but I don't care for it as much as I did when I was your age."

"I hope it will snow all night," declared Fred. "We haven't had any coasting in an age."

But the prospect of coasting to-morrow did not interfere with his enjoyment of a second cup of the chocolate and another cake when Mrs. Marley insisted that he have more.

After the cakes had disappeared, Fred went back to get his bank, and then, as it was too dark—so the mothers said—to go out and play in the snow, which by now covered the pavements and lawns with a thin, white covering, the Larues and the Williamsons went home.

Mr. Williamson was reading before the living-room fire, and Fred went in to tell him about the club meeting and to thank him for the prize riddle offer and the silver dollar he had sent the club fund.

"By the way, Fred," Mr. Williamson said presently, "wouldn't you rather open an account in the bank in the name of the Riddle Club? That iron bank of yours must be heavy to carry around, and

besides you have too much money in it now to allow yourself to be careless."

"Oh, I like to take care of it, Daddy," was Fred's answer. "Nothing will happen to it; I'm not careless."

"Fred, I just found your bank on the hall table," said his mother, coming into the room. "That isn't the place to leave it."

Fred looked a little confused.

"I was on my way upstairs, Mother," he said, with dignity. "I stopped to speak to Daddy."

CHAPTER XIV

ON POND'S HILL

FRED took his bank upstairs and hid it in the usual place. That night he dreamed he was president of a bank and the members of the Riddle Club came to him to pay their dues faster than he could take the money in. There seemed to be a great many more members than six, and presently Fred discovered the reason—the Conundrum Club members had joined!

The shock of this discovery woke him up. It was morning, but so gray and dull that Fred was ready to turn over and go to sleep. Then he remembered that it had begun to snow the night before and he hopped out of bed and pattered to the window. It was still snowing and everything in sight was well covered.

Of course there was no sleep for Fred after that, and not much for the rest of the Williamson family. Usually Fred waited till his father called him before he started to dress, but this morning he was downstairs and prancing about on the porch when his father came to look for him.

"Here, here, can't you wait till after breakfast?" asked Mr. Williamson. "Mother is going to bake hot cakes, and the boy who appears with his hair combed and his necktie straight is going to have the first one."

Fred dashed back to his room and hastily brushed his hair. He and Margy felt a deep interest in hot cakes, but it must be confessed they were also "crazy" about the snow. They could hardly wait to eat their breakfast, bundle themselves into coats and hats and woolly scarfs, and plunge into that beautiful whiteness.

"Hello!" called Artie, from his porch, as he saw the Williamsons about to start for school. "Wait a minute!"

The Marley front steps had not been brushed off, and Artie had no idea of the depth of the snow. He took one step and sank into a feathery, fluffy bed up to his neck.

"Gee, I missed that next step," he said, with perfect good humor, rising and brushing himself off. "Here comes Polly."

Polly and the Larues joined the others, and, running and laughing, they began the walk to school. The flying flakes stung their eyes and melted on their faces, and it was fun to make snowballs and hurl them at the fences and trees they passed and, yes, at each other.

"We'll go coasting this afternoon, sure," said Fred, as they reached the school-yard gate.

Home they raced at the close of the afternoon session to get out the sleds hidden in attic and cellar since the winter before.

The boys had each a sled, and Polly and Jess had their own, but Margy preferred to claim a share in Fred's long racer. She could never be induced to go down the hill alone, and most of the time she coasted with Polly.

"Everybody's here," said Ward, cheerfully, when they reached Pond's Hill, a beautiful slope on the other side of town.

It was still snowing fitfully, but the flakes were larger, an indication that the storm was beginning to let up. Artie and Ward wished it would snow for a week, but the older folk thought that a day and a night should satisfy any one.

"There's Carrie Pepper," whispered Polly to Margy.

"And Mattie Helms," added Jess.

"And Joe Anderson," said Artie. "He has a new sled."

Fred heard and turned to look. Sure enough, Joe had a new sled and it was a beauty, long and low and with the flexible steering gear of the best make of sled. Harry Worden, a post-graduate

student in the high school, was examining Joe's possession in evident admiration.

"Some sled!" was his verdict.

Then he saw Fred and waved to him. The Riddle Club members knew Harry Worden very well. The spring before, when he was a high school senior, he had served as referee at a riddle contest held between their club and the Conundrum Club. They liked him very much.

"Hello, Fred," called Harry. "Come on over here and look at this."

Fred went over to the other side of the road, glad of a chance to see the new sled more closely.

"It's a peach!" he told Joe, heartily. "Present?"

"Got it for my birthday," Joe answered. "This sled cost a lot, and it's better than any one else's. I'll bet I can beat any one on the hill now."

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure of that," drawled Harry Worden, lazily. "It isn't always the sled that wins a race. Something depends on the boy who does the steering."

"Bet you I can beat any one on the 'ill," Joe boasted.

Harry only laughed and turned away and Fred went back to his friends.

"Take Margy down first, Fred," Polly sug-

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gested. "She has more fun before her feet get cold."

Margy was apt to complain, midway in her outdoor sport, that her feet were "freezing."

Fred obligingly took his sister on behind him, but neither one could be said to enjoy the ride down the hill. Margy shut her eyes tight and Fred declared she pinched him.

"I didn't!" said the indignant Margy. "I had to hang on to something, didn't I? Anyway, Fred Williamson, you go too fast."

Polly said Margy should coast with her next, and amicable relations were restored, as Fred shot down the hill alone, deftly curving in and out to avoid the sleds that were flying down at the same time.

"I wish I could steer as well as Fred can," sighed Polly, taking her place on her own sled with Margy back of her. "It's because he isn't afraid to take a chance. He will go around a sled or almost into the ditch. But I'm always thinking of a smash-up."

Ward and Artie were enjoying themselves in their own way, which was a peculiar one, to say the least. Ward liked to lie flat on his sled with Artie perched on top of him, and if one or the other rolled off in the course of the descent, why, that was nothing at all! Snow, argued Ward and

Artie, was soft and comfortable, and one could always get out of the way of an approaching sled by tumbling over and over till safe from the danger of being run down.

Jess, too, had a method, and she followed it faithfully. Hers was a sober enjoyment, for she went down the hill on her sled, turned around and trudged back, to do the same thing again. Left alone, Jess would coast contentedly a whole morning or afternoon, without mishap or apparent excitement.

Polly and Fred liked to try experiments. They tried Polly's sled with Fred steering, and Fred's sled with Polly guiding it. They went down backward once and landed in the ditch. They tried to see how many children they could pile on the two sleds, and they raced each other with enthusiasm.

It was when they were returning from one of these races that Harry Worden hailed them.

"Hey, Fred, want some fun?" he shouted.

Fred did, and he and Polly ran over to where Harry stood.

"Joe Anderson wants a race," said Harry. "He thinks your sled is probably the fastest on the hill, next to his. Want to try a race?"

"Sure," answered Fred, quickly. "I'm willing."

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The news of the proposed race spread in a moment, and a crowd of boys and girls gathered around Fred and Joe.

"Go to it, Fred," some cried. "You can win."

"Joe has the best sled," others insisted. "No one can win against that flier. It's a peach."

"Oh, I don't know—Fred can get a lot of speed out of his old boat," said one of the boys.

Albert Holmes sniffed.

"Old boat, is right," he said. "It's about fifty years old."

Fred grinned good-naturedly. His sled wasn't new, but it wasn't falling apart yet, he assured them.

"I'm going down to the foot of the hill to watch the finish," announced Harry Worden. "Billy Pierce will give you the word to start."

Jess and Artie and Ward decided to stay at the top of the hill, but Polly tagged along after Harry, and Margy went with her. As soon as they reached the foot of the hill, Harry waved his arm as a signal to Billy Pierce to give the word to the racers.

"There they go!" cried Polly, as the two black specks at the top of the hill suddenly shot down.

The snow had stopped half an hour before, and the hill was well packed from the sleds and the

feet of the coasters. It was cold, but even Margy forgot that in the excitement of the moment.

The sleds seemed to be evenly matched half of the distance, then one pulled slightly ahead.

"It's Fred!" said Polly, in a half-whisper. "I know him by his cap."

Fred's sled, if it was Fred's sled, kept the lead. The other did not gain.

"Fred shot around that well in the road, I guess, and Joe must have gone in and out—that takes time," said Harry. "But you're likely to land in the ditch, going around."

The watchers could see now that it was Fred who was ahead. Margy thought she felt a flake of snow and looked up at the sky, while Harry allowed his gaze to wander past the racing sleds to the top of the hill. It was but a moment, but Polly was the only one to see what happened in that moment.

"He turned him!" she cried. "I saw him do it! That Joe Anderson would do anything to win! Don't let him, Harry. Please, don't let him!"

Harry Worden looked at the sleds, now near enough to be plainly distinguished. Joe Anderson was in the lead, grinning triumphantly, and Fred was just swinging his sled back on the course.

"Told you I could do it!" said Joe, as his sled swept past Polly and Margy and Harry. "Can't beat this sled!"

"You cheated!" Polly accused him, almost beside herself with anger. "I saw you! You put out your hand and shoved Fred over to the left. That isn't fair, and don't you dare——"

Fred tumbled off his sled and came up to them. He looked angry, but when he saw Polly he tried to grin.

"I won!" said Joe Anderson, boastfully. "You did pretty well, Fred. But of course your steering gear is out of date."

"You cheated!" said Polly again.

Harry Worden looked troubled.

"Of course, I wasn't looking," he said slowly, "and I didn't see what happened. But Polly seems to think——"

Fred turned to Polly and blazed at her, to her utmost astonishment, for he had never spoken to her like that in his life.

"You keep still!" he cried angrily. "I lost the race, and that's all there is to it."

"No, that isn't all there is to it," Harry Worden corrected him. "You race again, and this time I intend to know what is going on."

CHAPTER XV

DETECTIVE MARGY

"I PROMISED my mother I'd go home at half-past four," said Joe, uneasily.

"You can stay another ten or fifteen minutes," Harry informed him. "You go back and tell Billy Pierce I say this race is to be done over. Tell him there's no decision."

"I'll tell him you wouldn't give a decision," said Joe, hotly. "I won, and you're afraid to say so, just because Polly Marley——"

"I haven't much doubt about your cheating, Joe," said Harry, as coolly as he usually spoke. "But as I didn't see what happened with my own eyes, I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt. You're lucky, if you'd only see it the right way."

Joe turned sullenly away and began to plod up the hill, dragging his sled after him. At the top of the hill Billy Pierce held the eager coasters back, for he could see that some sort of argument was taking place below.

"Just a minute, Fred," said Harry, as Fred turned to go back. "Are you willing to race again?"

"Sure," said Fred, looking everywhere but at Harry or Polly.

"Were you knocked off the road?" asked Harry, a little hesitantly.

"I lost the race, and that's all there is to it," said Fred, doggedly.

"All right, go on," Harry dismissed him.

"Joe put out his hand and gave him a big push," said Polly, watching Fred as he trudged up the hill. "If I was Fred I'd tell him what a cheat he is. I never could stand that Joe Anderson."

"I didn't see him do anything," declared Margy, mildly.

"You never do see anything," retorted Polly, for, gentle as she was, any unfairness always roused her, and once "woke up," as Jess called it, she was not easily soothed.

"I'm afraid we were asleep at the switch, Margy," said Harry Worden ruefully. "This time I mean to glue my eyes on the road and keep them there."

"But Fred must know he cheated," argued Polly.

"Well, you see, Fred's idea of a good loser is one who doesn't grunt," Harry tried to explain.

"He'd rather say nothing than be thought complaining because he failed to win."

Polly was not convinced, but she said nothing more. And she and Harry and Margy stared at the white road till their eyes ached, waiting for the two black specks to come toward them.

It was a long hill, and when the boys reached the top there were explanations to be made to Billy Pierce and the curious boys and girls who wanted to know what had happened. Seated at last on their sleds, Joe made a start before the signal was given and had to be brought back. The next time he sulked and did not start at all, and it was Fred who had to turn around.

At last, though, they got off, and those at the foot of the hill saw the two dots swooping downward. There was one bad spot in the road—the depression Harry had mentioned—and Fred grimly swung his sled around, grazing the deep ditch and even trembling a fraction of a second on the edge before he threw his weight to the right and shot back to the center of the road.

Joe had decided to take the hole, changed his mind too late, and went into it sideways as a result of his effort to swing to the left as Fred had done. He almost upset his sled, but righted it in time and was out of the hole a half yard behind the flying Fred. As the boys had discovered, it

was Fred's quick judgment and willingness to "take a chance" that gave him the advantage. He had strong wrists, too, and could change his course as easily as Joe could change his mind.

That was Joe's great drawback—this habit of changing his mind. It interfered seriously with his steering, for if there is one place where it is not wise to change your mind, it is on a steep hill. Having once decided on his course, the wise coaster sticks to it. Joe's indecision was reflected in the wobbly movements of his sled, and this time he came in a yard behind Fred.

"No doubt about that," said Harry, with relief. "You win, Fred."

"I won the other—only you wouldn't play fair," said Joe, hardily.

"It's getting dark, but there's still time for another race if you want to call it a tie," declared Harry, swiftly. "Is it a tie, Joe?"

"Oh, let Fred have it—I don't care," Joe mumbled.

"I'll race again," said Fred, after a moment's silence.

"No, the others are coasting now," decided Harry. "We can't hold them up any longer, for it's getting dark. Fred wins, and if I were you, Joe, I wouldn't go around making any uncalled-for remarks."

Joe took his sled and went back without a word. Harry Worden followed him to make sure that a truthful report was spread around, and Polly and Fred ploughed slowly up the road, at one side, pulling Margy on Fred's sled.

"I didn't mean to snap at you, Polly," said Fred, a little shyly. "I guess I sounded pretty cranky."

"Oh, that's all right," declared Polly, determined not to let him know he had hurt her feelings. "I didn't mind that, Fred. But I saw Joe Anderson push you—I certainly did."

"Well, you want to forget that and forget it for good," said Fred, stopping in the snow and speaking very earnestly. "I don't care if he tipped me off and rode over me. When I lose a race I'm not going to parade any excuses."

"I'll never say a word about it, Fred, if that's the way you feel," Polly promised. "But I do think boys are too queer for anything."

"Of course they are," observed Margy from her seat of state. "I've always said they were funny, but you would never believe it."

For once in their lives, the children in River Bend had enough snow. After the coasters went home, more snow fell, and it continued to snow at intervals all night. As a result a whole new world, without a footprint from the day before

left on it, was ready for inspection the next morning.

"Tell you what let's do," remarked Artie, as they came home from school at noon. "Build a snowman!"

"I don't think that's so much fun," Margy maintained.

"Oh, I don't mean just a snowman," explained Artie. "Not one of those little ones the kids build. I mean a great, big giant of a snowman with a head higher than a house!"

"How would we build a snowman as high as that?" demanded Fred. "Get in a tree and put his head on?"

"We could use a stepladder," said Artie.

Though inclined at first to laugh at this scheme, the more they discussed it, the better it sounded.

"They had an enormous snowman over in Stockton," said Artie, naming a neighboring town. "Daddy read about it. They built him in the main square, and every one helped. He had electric lights for eyes and clothes and everything."

"I'll bet we could build one just as good," declared Ward. "We'll make ours the tallest snowman River Bend ever saw."

"Let's make him a big hat with R.C. on it," suggested Polly. "Then every one will know he belongs to the Riddle Club."

This idea was pronounced "great," and the Riddle Club could hardly wait till school was out to begin their statue.

A snowball fight was in progress in the school yard when they went back after lunch, and the battle continued furiously till the one o'clock bell rang. Flushed and warm, the pupils marched up to their classrooms, and on the stairs Polly made a distressing discovery.

Her precious Riddle Club pin was missing!

These pins had been envied or admired by every pupil in the school, and there was probably nothing Polly owned which possessed more value in her eyes.

She thought the loss warranted writing a note to Margy, though the teacher severely discouraged this practice.

"Lost your pin!" Margy's lips echoed silently, when she had read the note. "How perfectly awful! Where?"

Polly shook her head to show she did not know. But she was afraid she had lost it in the midst of the snowball battle, and the prospects of recovering it were exceedingly dim.

Now Margy had sharp eyes when she chose to use them, and she could be counted on to be interested in what went on outside her books. While poor Polly was trying to forget her troubles in the

writing lesson, Margy's dark eyes were roving over the room in search of amusement.

Carrie Pepper sat near her, over two aisles, and she, too, was apparently little interested in the lesson. When the teacher's back was turned, Carrie swiftly passed something to Mattie Helms, who sat behind her.

"I wonder what she has," thought Margy, idly.

Mattie's head bent over something as she examined it, then she dropped her pencil. It rolled under the desks and Mattie stooped to get it. As she straightened up, she dropped the something lightly on Joe Anderson's writing book.

Margy could not see, from where she sat, what the something was, but, like a flash, she guessed.

"Polly's pin!" She almost said the words aloud. "Polly's pin! Carrie was right behind her coming up the stairs this noon. I'll bet she found the pin, and she's so mean, she won't give it back."

Margy hastily took her pen and attacked the writing lesson. She wanted to think. Apparently absorbed in the work before her, she was planning to find out whether Carrie had really found the missing pin.

"It's something so small it doesn't show when she has it in her hand," Margy reasoned. "And she is showing it to Mattie and Joe, who aren't

exactly crazy about Polly or our club. I do believe it is Polly's pin, and I intend to find out."

Margy's writing lesson may have left something to be desired that day, but by three o'clock she had a clever plan worked out to solve the mystery.

"Wait a minute," she said to the impatient five, who waited for her in the hall. "Yes, I know you want to get to work on the snowman, but Polly lost her club pin this noon, and I think I've found it."

"Lost her pin?" echoed Jess. "Where?"

"You haven't found it?" gasped Polly.

"Well, of course I'm not sure," said Margy, modestly, "but I think I have. I noticed Carrie walked right behind you this noon, as you were going upstairs. I didn't think anything of that till I saw her passing something around this afternoon. I couldn't see what it was, but she showed it to Mattie Helms and to Joe Anderson."

"It might be anything," said Polly, gloomily.

"If it is the pin, what are you going to do about it?" Fred asked his sister. "You can't go up and accuse her of taking Polly's pin."

"I could, but I don't intend to," said Margy. "I might ask her and she would say she 'found' it. But I know a better way than that. I'm going back to our room now and you go out in the yard and wait for me. It will take me a little while."

"Look here, what are you up to?" said Fred, a little quickly.

"I'm going through Carrie's desk," returned Margy, placidly.

"Oh—suppose some one finds you?" said Jess, with a shiver of fear.

"They won't. That's why you have to wait," said Margy, who had thought out her plan carefully. "You see, I figure that if Carrie found the pin she won't dare wear it and she won't take it home to show her mother, because she would make her give it back. She can't do a thing with it, but keep it to plague Polly and show the Conundrum Club. So I think she'll leave it in her desk, and I mean to take it out."

CHAPTER XVI

RIDDLE CHAP

OF course it wasn't the right thing to do—to go through Carrie's desk. Margy herself had the feeling that she was in the wrong, but she certainly didn't mean to let Carrie keep Polly's pin if she had it. Neither did Margy like the idea of telling the teacher and asking her to have Carrie search her desk.

"I'm the one to get that pin back, and I'm going to do it," thought Margy, as she marched upstairs, leaving five sober-faced children to wait for her.

Luckily, there was no one in the classroom when Margy entered it. She supposed a burglar must feel as she did when she thrust her right hand into Carrie's desk. Two pencils, a box of candy cough drops, a handkerchief with a gingham border—Margy's fingers touched the back of the desk. There, far up in one corner, she felt something that pricked her.

"Ouch!" she said, and drew out the pin.

Waiting only to return the things she had taken out, Margy flew down the stairs and presented the pin to an astonished and delighted Polly.

"And don't lose it again," she lectured her. "I might not be able to find it so easily a second time."

"I'll be careful," promised Polly.

"Did Carrie really have it in her desk?" asked Jess, round-eyed.

"She certainly did!" replied Margy, as they started to walk home. "I was almost sure she'd keep it there."

"Say, what will she say when she can't find it to-morrow morning?" said Artie. "And if she sees Polly wearing it, what will she think?"

"I don't care what she thinks," broke in Fred. "The point is, she can't say anything. She won't dare go around saying some one went through her desk, because she'd sound nice saying that some one took a Riddle Club pin she found on the stairs, wouldn't she?"

"Perhaps she wasn't sure it *was* my pin," suggested Polly.

But the others laughed at this idea. The new pins Mr. Kirby had sent them were quite unlike any other pins in the town of River Bend and certainly Carrie knew them as well as the pins of

her own Conundrum Club. Besides, wasn't Polly's name on the back?

"Let's take our pins off before we begin to build the snowman," said Polly, when they came in sight of their homes. "We might easily lose one in the snow."

This was hailed as a wise precaution, and they ran in to put their individual pins in safe places.

Fred stopped short in surprise when he saw his room. The rug had been taken up, the bed was rolled in one corner, and his closet door was wide open. A row of his shoes stood on a newspaper spread on the window sill and in the center of his rocking chair sat the precious bank. A strange woman was down on her hands and knees, mopping the floor with hot water.

"I guess you're Fred," she said, smilingly. "Your ma set me to cleaning this room this afternoon. I'll put things back just the way you had them."

Fred put his pin on the cushion on his bureau—which was covered with a white towel to protect it from dust—and then glanced at his bank. He didn't like to leave it there.

"I'll take it over to the clubroom and leave it there, I guess," he said to himself. "It won't hurt to leave it there all night."

It had been decided to build the gigantic snow-

man between the Marley and the Williamson house, because they had the advantage of two large yards filled with snow. Fred found that Ward and Artie had already started to roll a ball for the body of the snowman.

"I've been thinking," said Fred, joining them: "What shall we make the letters R.C. of? If we do them in snow they won't show up very well."

"We can get red flannel or something," said the resourceful Polly.

"I think red and white would be pretty, because Christmas is coming."

"Maybe we can give him a little Christmas tree to hold," said Jess. "That would look fine, wouldn't it? A great, big snowman, holding a Christmas tree."

"There—this is a good place to stand him," declared Fred. "Don't roll the ball any larger. We can begin to build now."

They had a fair sized ball of snow rolled, and Fred had chosen a spot near the walk to have him stand.

"Get all the snow you can and plaster it against this ball," directed Fred. "We'll have a fat snowman while we're about it."

River Bend was a happy town in which to live, if you happened to be fond of playing in the snow.

There was no limit to the quantities you could collect, if you were willing to work and the storm had been a heavy one. Jess and Ward got out the wheel-barrow and trundled loads of the white stuff from their own lawn. As Ward said, it was a pity to "let it waste."

"Wait a minute," said Fred, suddenly. "We're forgetting his legs. If we build him sitting down, he won't be nearly tall enough. We must start two columns, and use them for legs, and then put the ball of snow on top of them."

So they set to work and soon had two large, squatty columns of snow that looked like the piling in Ward's father's wharf.

"The snow packs fine, doesn't it?" said Polly to Margy.

The girls were as busy as the boys, hauling snow and packing it down firmly, and never a word did Margy say about cold feet. She was far too interested to pay attention to her feet.

"Now we'll have to lift that ball somehow," said Fred, when the legs were pronounced finished. "You and Polly get on one side, Margy, and Ward and Artie get over here. Jess and I'll take this side."

The snow was not very heavy to lift, but it was hard to handle, and so cold that they felt it through their gloves. With some difficulty,

they finally had it in place, and the statue already looked like a snowman, Artie declared, stepping back to view their handiwork.

"Well, we've come to the place where we'll have to have a stepladder," said Fred.

"Why don't we use the loft ladder?" asked Jess. "That's light and easy to carry."

"We can't lean it against the snowman—he'd topple over," replied Fred. "We have a stepladder, but I noticed it up in our hall. The cleaning woman was probably using it."

"I'll get ours," offered Polly. "I know where it is—on the back porch. I can bring it."

Fred and Artie went with her and brought the ladder back. Then it had to be set up with care, for every one knows that a stepladder takes delight in falling over just as you reach the top step. Fred opened it and fastened the bars and ran lightly up to the top to test it.

"That's all right," he said. "Say, this is fun. We can pretend we're brick-layers and bring up hods filled with snow."

"We haven't any hods," Ward reminded him.

"That flat board will do," said Fred. "Here, give it to me; I'll show you."

He took a flat light board that happened to be on the ground and scooped two handfuls of snow on it. Then he mounted the ladder, carry-

ing the board and the snow, and deposited them on the square little shelf that was under the top step.

"Here you are, Riddle Chap," he addressed the snowman's body. "We are going to make you the best looking chap for miles around."

"Riddle Chap!" cried Artie. "That's fine, Fred. We'll call him that. His initials stand for Riddle Chap, don't they?"

"Well, of course, he has to have a name," Fred chuckled. "If we're going to make him as large as life, he'll need a name so we can introduce him to our friends."

Each of the boys and girls took turns going up and down the ladder and each added some new beauty to the snowman. He had buttons on his waistcoat, and arms that crooked at the elbows—that was Polly's idea. She had taken two pieces of old rubber hose and bent them to look like arms. The snow had been carefully packed around and over these.

Ward and Artie made the neck, and they all shaped the head with its peaked cap. Margy insisted that the initials were not to go on till the head was in place, and this proved a wise plan, for they dropped the head three times and had to do it over before Fred and Artie finally succeeded in putting it on the neck.

"Oh, for pity's sake!" cried Polly, watching from the ground. "You have it turned all the way around! The poor snowman is looking backward."

Slowly and carefully, Fred turned the head till it faced in the right direction. Then Margy handed up the letters cut from strips of red flannel, and Fred put them on the visor of the cap. The snowman had coal black eyes, a mouth like a red pepper, and ears that bore a resemblance to orange peel. He was very tall indeed—far taller than any of those who had made him—and when his makers looked at him they were agreed that he was quite the largest statue they had ever tried to build.

"If it's cold to-night, we can throw water over it and let it freeze," said Fred, standing off a little to admire his handiwork.

"There's Carrie," said Jess, in a low tone. "See her coming out? I guess she is going to the post-office."

"What are you doing?" Carrie called, from across the street. "What's that funny thing?"

Before they could answer her, she had crossed over and was staring at the snowman.

"Well, of all the queer things to do!" said Carrie. "Regular child play, I call it, building a snowman."

"That's some snowman you have there!" called a hearty voice, and Harry Worden crossed from the other side of the street. "I'll take a picture of him to-morrow for you, when the sun is out. I don't think I ever saw as large a one as that."

"Is it as large as the one they had in Stockton last year?" asked Artie, hopefully.

"Much taller," replied Harry. "I'd like to get a snapshot of this one. Don't let anything happen to him, and I'll be around in the afternoon as soon as school is out."

Carrie went on to the post-office. It was nearly dark, and in a few minutes the five o'clock whistle would sound.

"Gee, it will be nice to have a picture of our snowman," said Artie. "We can frame it and have it in our clubroom."

Fred looked a little startled.

"Speaking of the clubroom reminds me of something," he said hurriedly. "Mind if I go over to your house, Artie?"

"Sure, come on," replied Artie, hospitably. "Want that book I said I'd lend you?"

"I want to go up to the clubroom a minute," explained Fred.

But when he went upstairs with Artie, the clubroom door was locked. Ward had the key as usual.

"I started to bring the bank over here this afternoon," said Fred, a little worried frown between his eyes. "I thought I did it. But if I didn't, what *did* I do with the bank?"

"Maybe you left it in your own room," said Artie, comfortably.

"I'm sure I didn't," Fred answered. "But it won't hurt to go and look. I might have put it down again without thinking."

"Lots of times I think I've done a thing and haven't," observed Artie, trotting beside Fred, as he went back to the Williamson house. "And sometimes I think I didn't do a thing and it turns out that I did."

But neither of these "thinks" proved of much help to Fred. The bank was not in his room, now in perfect, shining order with his things in their accustomed places. It was not on the hall table where he had once left it. In fact, the sad fact dawned on Fred, slowly and unhappily, that he had lost the bank and its precious contents.

CHAPTER XVII

LOST TREASURES

"LET's go out and look in the snow," suggested Artie. "You must have dropped it between your house and ours."

As the two boys opened the front door a whirl of snow flew in their faces. In the brief time they had been within doors a new snowstorm had gained headway.

"Who's that?" called Fred, suddenly.

"Who's that yourself?" Carrie Pepper's voice retorted. "Your old snowman is enough to scare any one going by—they'll think it is a giant."

Carrie hurried across the street with the mail, and Fred tried not to think she might have been hunting around the snowman.

"She *was* stooped over," he said to himself. "But she may have dropped a letter. Anyway, I don't suppose she would take the bank if she found it."

Then he remembered Polly's pin.

"She might think it would plague me," he thought. And he had to admit that if that was Carrie's plan—always provided she had found the bank—she could not think of a better plan for teasing him.

"Well, it isn't here, that's all," declared Artie, brushing the snow off his gloves after an unsuccessful grubbing about in the snow. "I don't see what you could have done with it, Fred."

"Oh, Fred!" Jess's voice came to them out of the storm. "Is that you? I came back to look for my glove. I don't suppose you've seen it?"

"Your glove?" repeated Fred. "Is that lost?"

"Yes, it is, and it's a brand new one," returned Jess, ready to cry. "Mother got them for me when she went to the city. They're brushed wool, and they're gauntlets, and they cost six dollars!"

"Gee, that's tough luck," said Artie, sympathetically. "But I don't believe you lost it around here, Jess. I've been all around the snowman on my hands and knees, and I would have found it if it had been anywhere around."

"Did you lose something, too?" asked Jess, surprised.

Fred was in no mood to hide his troubles.

"I've lost the bank," he said abruptly. "And all the club money in it. I had it before we

started to build the snowman, and now I can't find it."

"Isn't it in your house?" asked Jess.

Fred explained where he and Artie had looked.

"Well, I never heard of such a thing!" said Jess. "My good glove and your bank gone! Somebody must have picked them up—that's all."

"Carrie Pepper was out here when we started to look," Artie announced.

"Then she found it!" cried Jess. "I'm going right over now to her house and ask her to give me back my glove. You come along, Fred, and make her give you the bank. That's the same as stealing, to take things like that."

"It isn't stealing to take one glove," protested Artie.

"'Tis, too," insisted Jess. "What good is one glove? No good at all! Carrie Pepper knows those gloves are new. She has to give it back to me, that's all there is to it."

"Well, you take my advice and go mighty slow about accusing any one of taking your glove," said Fred, earnestly. "I'd no more go to her and ask her for the bank than I'd fly. I might as well come right out and say she stole it."

"She took Polly's pin, didn't she?" Jess demanded.

"That's different. Lots of people might take

a pin, and they wouldn't take money. Besides, how do we know Carrie didn't intend to give the pin back to Polly? Margy didn't give her a chance to return it."

"Jess! Jessie! Come in right away!" called Mrs. Larue.

Jess had to go in to supper without her glove, and Artie went home, too. Fred looked around in the snow for a few minutes longer, but the storm was increasing and he finally gave up. He could hardly touch his supper, and afterward he told his father what had happened.

"I'm sorry I didn't put the money in the bank, as you said," poor Fred concluded his story. "But I never thought I could lose a thing like a bank."

"Well, Fred, it seems as though it must turn up," Mr. Williamson said, trying to speak cheerfully. "I don't see, myself, how a bank and its money contents could disappear, unless some one has stolen it. And we won't think that."

"Try to remember where you had it last, Fred," his mother suggested.

"Why, I *thought* I took it over to the Marleys' to leave in the clubroom," said Fred. "I can't remember letting it out of my hand. But the room was locked and Ward hadn't been near it."

"Perhaps you left it somewhere else in the

Marleys’,” said Mrs. Williamson, “and you were in such a hurry to get out and build the snowman, you did not notice. If Artie or Polly find it, they’ll be over to tell you.”

But neither Polly nor Artie found the bank. Fred went over there before going to bed—and had to plough through several inches of fresh snow—but none of the Marley family had seen the bank.

In the morning the window sills were banked high with snow and there were no foot prints around the snowman, who stood tall and strong, a handsome guard for the street.

“We’ll give him a tree to hold before Harry Worden comes to take his picture,” said Ward, eagerly.

But Fred felt little interest in the snowman. He could think of nothing but the missing bank.

“I’ll resign as treasurer,” he said to Polly, on their way to school.

The sun was out and the snow had stopped. A white world, brilliant and beautiful, was spread before their eyes.

“I’ll resign,” said Fred. “I’m not fit to be treasurer and take care of other people’s money. I’m too careless. And I’ll save every cent of my allowance and pay all the money back to the club.”

“Don’t be silly, Fred,” Polly told him loyally.

"We don't want you to resign. No one will be as good a treasurer as you are."

"I'm no good at all," said Fred, bitterly.

"Yes, you are, too!" flashed Polly. "You're fine. It isn't exactly your fault that the bank is lost. Every one is likely to lose things. You don't have to have to make the money up, either. If one of us had lost it, you wouldn't make him pay the money back. Besides, Mother says she is sure the bank will be found."

"Did she say that?" asked Fred, hopefully. "Daddy thought so, too. I wish it would be found, but I feel it is gone for good. And the worst of it is, I can't remember putting it down anywhere."

"What do you suppose Carrie Pepper will say when she sees me wearing my pin?" said Polly, hoping to take Fred's mind off his troubles.

Instead, she only succeeded in starting his thoughts on another tack. Had Carrie Pepper found anything in the snow the night before? Or was she merely feeling around for a letter or parcel she might have dropped?

"I hate these ugly old mittens," Jess was complaining to Margy. "They're not a bit pretty, and they're not nearly as warm as my lovely gloves. Mother says maybe she'll get me a new pair for my birthday in February, but I'll have to

wear these horrid old things till then, because I'm so careless."

Margy, not having lost any treasure, felt free to keep an eye on Carrie and observe the effect of Polly's pin on her. Polly had the pin in its usual place—above the pocket of her middy blouse, and Carrie apparently did not notice it until Polly went to the board during the arithmetic lesson.

"There—she's seen it," said Margy to herself, as Carrie stared.

Then, heedless of the lesson, Carrie began to rummage through her desk. She pulled out the box of cough drops, the pencils, the handkerchief, and an apple she had brought for recess. Then, keeping her eye on the board as though she were following the example, her hands began to explore the desk. She was feeling for the pin.

Perhaps the intensity of Margy's gaze made her glance over her shoulder. Margy's eyes were dancing. A sudden, deep flush spread over Carrie's face.

"Now she knows," said Margy to herself. "And the next time she finds anything that doesn't belong to her, I hope she'll give it up."

Harry Worden came that afternoon and took a picture of "Riddle Chap," but Fred could think only of his bank and Jess was looking for her

glove all the time the snapshots were being taken. It was lucky that something happened to distract their attention and, in the case of Fred, it was doubly welcome. He felt so bad to think he had lost the money belonging to the club that his mother was afraid he would worry himself sick.

"You try to get the prize riddle, Fred," Mrs. Williamson told him. "That will give the treasury a good start again."

Fred said he would try, but that noon he came home from school, excited and eager.

"The principal was telling us this morning in assembly, Mother," said Fred, "that there is a family in River Bend who is just about starving to death. The town is going to take care of them, but there are six children in the family and they want to give them a real Christmas. The day before school closes they're going to take up a collection."

"And I suppose you want me to tell you and Margy how to earn some money," said Mrs. Williamson, smiling.

"No, I have a new scheme," said Fred. "We're going to have a session of the Riddle Club before Christmas. I haven't had a chance to talk this over with Polly yet, but I thought it would be fine if we had an open meeting and asked

the fathers and mothers to come. The way you did in camp this summer, you know."

"I don't see what that has to do with the Christmas collection," said Margy, who was listening.

"It has a lot to do with it," Fred retorted. "I thought that, instead of paying forfeits when Mother and the others missed a riddle, they could pay money, and we could give the money to the poor children. And if we missed riddles, we'd pay, too."

"Why, Fred, I like that plan very much," said his mother. "I'm sure Polly will like it, too. Tell her as soon as you can, so you'll all have time to study up hard riddles."

"You won't mind not being able to guess them, will you, Mother?" laughed Margy. "You like to help people along."

When Mr. Williamson heard of this plan, he was even more enthusiastic than his wife. He said he had a plan of his own, but that he would keep it a secret till the meeting.

CHAPTER XVIII

A PRACTICAL JOKE

POLLY approved of Fred's plan the moment she heard it; and the Riddle Club members fell upon the riddle books—well-worn by this time—old scrap books, and clippings and even went about among their acquaintances, collecting difficult riddles.

"For we must make them as hard as we can," said Polly, earnestly. "Then no one will be able to guess them and we'll have heaps of money to take to school for the collection."

But, of course, they couldn't think of riddles every hour in the day, no matter how interested they were in the coming meeting. There was, as Artie observed, "a good deal of weather going on," and it alternately rained and snowed for three days. This added to the beauty of the snowman, for he grew a little icicle beard, and he wore earrings, too, formed of the melted and frozen snow.

"I think we ought to break those off," said

Ward, much scandalized. "I never saw a man wear earrings."

"Don't touch that snowman," ordered Fred. "If he wants to wear earrings, let him! Every one says he is the biggest snow statue we ever had in River Bend, and we're not going to spoil him picking on him."

The pictures Harry Worden had taken turned out beautifully, and he had had an enlargement made for the Riddle Club clubroom. Mrs. Marley cleverly framed it in an old frame that fitted exactly, and the snowman hung on the wall of the pretty clubroom and was much admired.

Though Fred had searched diligently for his bank and never ceased to mourn it, he could not find it, nor even a trace of where it might have been. Jess sympathized with him deeply—as indeed they all did, for Fred had been so very proud of the money saved.

"I'd give anything, if I could find that bank," said Fred, twenty times a day. "I don't see what I could have done with it. And why can't I remember where I put it down or where I had it last?"

"I don't know," Jess would sigh. "I don't see, myself, how you could lose a whole bank. But then, I lost my lovely glove, and the one that's left isn't a bit of good. And they cost six

dollars—they were real brushed wool. Oh, dear, it's awful to lose things, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't care if I'd lost a glove," said Fred. "I wouldn't mind losing anything of mine, even my new stickpin Aunt Katherine sent me. Because that would be mine and it wouldn't affect any one else. But here I've gone and lost all the money that belongs to the Riddle Club! I'm saving my allowance, but it will be a million years before I get enough saved to make up for what I lost. What's a glove, compared to a bank?"

Along about this time of year school began to be what Jess called "exciting." The classes stayed after school several afternoons to make decorations for the auditorium, where a Christmas party was always held. This year Polly had learned how to make pretty red flowers, and Miss Elliott, her teacher, suggested that if long wreaths were braided of crêpe paper strands and these flowers placed at intervals, the effect would be very pretty.

"It's a good deal of work," Miss Elliott said; "but the festoons will stay up till we come back to school after the holidays. There'll be a good many visitors at the school, just before Christmas, and we'd like the auditorium to look its best. If you'll make the flowers, Polly, we'll all help braid."

Polly was glad to make the flowers, and she stayed after school for an hour or two every afternoon, cutting and pasting.

"I'm so sick of braiding this silly old paper," Carrie Pepper complained to Mattie Helms. "I think it's mean we never have any of the fun. All Polly Marley has to do is to sit there and make flowers. Any one can make flowers, and it's interesting. Not like braiding this stuff."

"I don't think her flowers are much," commented Mattie. "Do you?"

"No, nothing extra," said Carrie. "There goes Fred Williamson. He looks at me so funny, every time he sees me."

Carrie did not know it, but Fred was almost sure she had taken his bank. He could not see her without wondering if she really would do a thing like that. He did not believe, for an instant, that she would take the bank and use the money, for that would be stealing; but he thought she might keep it, as she had Polly's pin, to torment him. He tried to imagine what she would say if he should walk up to her some day and ask her to hand back the bank. But he never did ask her, for his common sense told him he had nothing to uphold his suspicions and that it would be rather foolish to accuse Carrie of taking anything when he had no proof.

Polly worked on the flowers one afternoon till she had two dozen ready, all but the long green stems.

"I think I'll take these home," she said to Miss Elliott. "I can wrap the wire there and finish them easily."

"That's a good plan," Miss Elliott replied. "Here's a pasteboard box to carry them in. But don't try to do them all to-night, Polly—you ought to play outdoors an hour before you have supper. It's a shame to miss all this good coasting."

Polly put her flowers and the things she would need to finish them into the box her teacher gave her. She had just reached the steps when some one hailed her.

"Hey, Polly!" her brother shouted. "Come on over here! We're firing at targets!"

Polly looked. The boys had tacked up an empty tin can on one of the trees in the school yard and they were firing snowballs into it—that is, if a snowball went into it, it counted a bull's-eye.

"You watch me, Polly!" cried Artie, as Polly put her box down on the step and came running across the yard. "Bet you I hit it this time!"

He packed a firm, damp snowball, took careful aim, and fired.

"Did it!" he shrieked. "Told you so!"

Fred laughed and handed a ready-made ball to Polly.

"You try," he said.

Polly stepped back a few feet, shut her eyes, and threw the ball. It struck the tree a few feet above the tin can.

"Don't shut your eyes," instructed Fred. "You want to aim. Here, try again," and he gave her a second ball.

This time Polly hit the tree below the can. But her third trial was more successful, and the snow-ball went neatly into the can, scoring what Artie enthusiastically informed her was "a peach of a bull's-eye."

"I can't stay another minute," said Polly, when they asked her to try again. "Where's Jess and Margy? I have to go on home and finish some more flowers."

"Jess had to go to the dentist and Margy went to take a music lesson," Fred recited.

"Oh, of course—yes, I remember," said Polly. "Margy is coming over to-night to practice our duet."

Polly and Margy were to play a duet at the Christmas party in school.

Picking up the box she had left on the steps, Polly hurried off home, while the boys continued

to hurl snowballs at the tomato can with varying success but unwaning enthusiasm.

"I wouldn't work on those flowers now, Polly," said Mrs. Marley, when she saw her daughter. "You've been indoors all day, and you'll feel much better if you take your sled and have a coast or two before it's dark. I'll help you with the flowers after supper and we'll get them done in less than an hour."

So Polly went out again and met Margy, now through with her lesson, and they had four trips down the hill and back with their sleds before the five o'clock whistle sounded.

When Polly came in, she went upstairs to brush her hair. She had left the box of flowers on the bed in her room, and she was surprised to find a dark stain spreading over the counterpane.

"What in the world is that?" she said, in astonishment.

She lifted the box hastily. It was heavy with water, and it was water that had seeped through the pasteboard and made the stain.

Polly tore off the lid—melted snow!

"Some one put it there!" she cried. "But where are my flowers? I had them in the box—I never took them out—I don't see——"

She called her mother, and together they puzzled over it as they changed the bed clothes, for

even the blankets were soaked through from the water.

"Some one has played a trick on you," said Mrs. Marley, spreading clean sheets. "The paper flowers were light, so they could substitute snow without making a difference in weight. Where did you leave the box?"

"I didn't leave it——" Polly began.

Then she remembered.

"I put it down on the school steps while I tried to throw a snowball into the tomato can," she said. "But there was no one in the school yard, except the boys, Mother."

"Nevertheless, that is when the trick was done," declared Mrs. Marley. "Some one took out the flowers and the paper and wires and filled the box with snow. It's a mean thing to do, I'll admit; but I don't suppose they thought you'd put the box on the bed. They must have counted on your opening the box as soon as you reached home."

"But I promised Miss Elliott to bring her the flowers in the morning," said poor Polly, looking very much as though she might cry. "She wants them to put in the new rope that's already braided."

"Don't cry, Polly," said her mother. "You'll have the flowers. I have always said that the

best way to pay a practical joker back, is not to let him know his joke has been a success. We'll get Artie and Jess and Ward and Fred and Margy to come and help, and, working together, we can make and finish two dozen flowers this evening. Then, when you take them to school, don't say a word about the missing ones. Whoever played the trick will be waiting to hear you complain, and if you act as though nothing had happened they'll be more surprised than you were when you opened this box."

When the others heard what had happened, they were eager to help. Fortunately, Polly had the materials for making the flowers on hand, and as soon as supper was over the six chums set busily to work. Polly and her mother cut the flower patterns and helped start them, but the others soon learned how to fold and paste, and they refused to stop and rest until the full two dozen flowers were finished and neatly packed in another box.

"And here's a little ice-cream," said Mr. Marley, coming in as the scissors were being put away. "I thought the least I could do for such an industrious circle was to get them a little refreshment, since I have no talent for making paper flowers."

The next morning Carrie Pepper and Mattie

Helms watched to see what Polly would say when Miss Elliott came. To their intense surprise, Polly marched up to the desk and put down a pasteboard box.

"I finished the flowers, Miss Elliott," she said clearly.

Carrie looked at Mattie. They both felt a little foolish. And though neither would admit it, they admired Polly, who, instead of complaining and "fussing," had evidently managed in some mysterious way to get her flowers finished on time.

"Thank goodness, that's done," said Polly, with a sigh of relief, as she went back to her seat. "Now we can have the Riddle Club meeting to-night and enjoy ourselves."

CHAPTER XIX

THE SPECIAL MEETING

THAT night it began to snow again, the fine, steady snow that always promises a real storm. When Mr. Marley came home to supper, his overcoat was covered with the white flakes.

"It's lucky that every one lives near," said Mrs. Marley, lighting another electric lamp to make the dining-room more cheerful. "No one would want to go very far on a night like this."

"Oh, they would, Mother, if they were going to the Riddle Club," Artie assured her. "I'd go anywhere to a Riddle Club meeting."

Mrs. Marley laughed and said she was thankful she didn't have to tramp through a snow-storm to reach the meeting.

"Isn't it lovely to have this room?" said Polly to Artie, when, a little later, they went upstairs to the warm, well-lighted, pretty clubroom. Artie had borrowed the key from Ward, because they wanted to make sure the heat was turned on before the guests arrived.

"Think how it would be out in the barn on a night like this," remarked Artie, breathing on the window panes so that he could see out. "Gee, Polly, it's snowing yet."

A stamping and scuffling on the porch announced that the members and guests of the Riddle Club had arrived. The Williamsons, of course, had come from no further away than the next house and the Larues from across the street, but they were covered with the snow. They took off their coats and shook them on the porch, and even then, when Mr. Williamson took off his hat inside the house, a powdery shower of white fell to the rug.

Polly glanced at her mother as though to remind her of something.

"You'll want to have a business meeting before we come upstairs," said Mrs. Marley, pleasantly. "So run on up, children, and when you are ready for us, let Artie call."

Polly led the way up to the clubroom and called the meeting to order promptly.

"This is to be a short business meeting," she said gravely. "We have no unfinished business to consider and so there is only one thing to do."

"What's that?" asked the unsuspecting Fred.

"Collect the dues," said Polly, holding out a new copper bank to the club treasurer.

Margy declared afterward that she thought Fred was going to cry. His face got very red, and for a moment he did not say anything.

"You want me to collect the dues?" he asked, when he did speak. "Dues from you, after I lost all the club money?"

"Don't be silly," said Jess, from her corner. "Everybody knows you didn't lose the bank purposely. We've all brought our money, and it's up to you to collect it."

And Jess walked over and put a shining new dime in the slit in the bank. Artie followed her.

Never had Fred, in his experience as treasurer, found it so easy to collect dues from the entire membership. Even Ward did not argue, but insisted on paying his dime. And none of them would hear of Fred giving the bank to any one else to take care of, or leaving it in the clubroom.

"You're the treasurer, and you take care of it," said Polly. "You suit us, and if we don't fuss about the money that's lost I don't see why you should. Artie, go call the folks to come up."

The grown-ups came in and sat down in the chairs provided for them. Polly, who was now used to talking "standing up," as she said, thought it best to explain the purpose of the meeting again.

"This is a special kind of session of the Riddle Club," she said earnestly. "Instead of forfeits,

the ones who fail to guess a riddle must pay money, and the money collected is going to school, to be used for a poor family. But don't try flunking the riddles, because that isn't fair."

"You'd rather have good sportsmanship than a tray full of money, Polly?" asked Mr. Williamson, smiling.

Polly nodded.

"If we win the prize riddle to-night, we're going to give that to the collection, too," she said.

"That reminds me of something I have to say," Mr. Williamson declared. "I said I had a secret for you, and this is it: I'll pay ten cents to the school collection for every riddle that is guessed correctly here to-night and an extra five dollars if the prize riddle is solved, the extra money to go in the club bank."

Polly saw that Mr. Williamson had chosen that way of helping Fred make up the money lost, and she thought it was a most generous way. She didn't say so, but she smiled at Mr. Williamson and he knew that she understood what he was trying to do.

"I thought we'd open the answers to the prize riddle first," said Polly.

Choosing from the six folded papers on the table before her, she opened one and read it aloud.

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"The riddle was, 'Why do pianos bear the noblest characters?' And this answer says, 'Because they're always cheerful.' "

"They're not," said Margy, positively. "I guess I ought to know."

"No piano is cheerful when you're practicing your music lesson on it," agreed Mrs. Williamson, smiling.

"The second answer reads, 'Because they keep in tune,' " read Polly.

"Not so bad," said Mr. Williamson. "But it doesn't happen to be the one we're after."

Polly picked up a third paper.

"This one says, 'Because pianos are expensive.' " She tried not to laugh when she read this. She recognized the writing as Artie's.

"Here's another," she said hurriedly. "'Pianos bear the noblest characters because they are grand, upright, and square.' Why, that must be right!" added Polly, in surprise.

"Correct!" said Mr. Williamson. "See if that last paper has solved it, too. No? Well, then, will the prize winner please step forward and receive the prize?"

To the utter astonishment of the roomful, Margy came forward.

"Margy Williamson, you never guessed a riddle, did you?" gasped her mother.

If it had been Fred, no one would have wondered. But Margy! She who always complained that every riddle was too hard, that she couldn't spell the words in them or do the arithmetic they demanded of her. Margy!

"It isn't very complimentary to be so upset, Margy," said her daddy, putting a little white box in her hand; "but I must say you are the last member of the Riddle Club I thought would solve a prize riddle."

Margy grinned and opened her box. In it were two beautiful five dollar gold pieces.

"One goes in the bank," she said, slipping it in as she spoke, "and the other goes on the tray for the school collection," and she put the gold piece on the silver tray Mrs. Marley had loaned for this special occasion.

"How did you ever guess it?" Ward asked respectfully.

It was a question that each one had wanted to ask.

"Well, you see," Margy explained, "I can't guess riddles unless I have time to think about 'em. I thought and thought and *thought* about this one. Every time I sat down to practice, I thought some more. Then I heard Miss Elliott talking to the music supervisor one day, and she

said something about our school piano being out of date.

"'No school uses the old square pianos if they can get uprights,' she said.

"I looked 'upright' up in the dictionary," Margy went on, "and I found there was more than one meaning and one meant 'honest and square'; so I guessed both words could count. And Mattie Helms told me one day in school that she was going to take music lessons as soon as her mother bought a grand piano—and there I had another word to use. They all fitted in, so I just used them."

"Good for you, Margy!" cried Mr. Larue, clapping his hands. "You deserve to win the prize."

They all clapped Margy, and she settled down happily again on the window seat, between Artie and Jess.

"Now we'll ask the riddle," said Polly. "Margy, you begin, because you won."

"Daddy Williamson," said Margy, seriously, "What is that which by losing an eye has nothing left but a nose?"

"A one-eyed man?" guessed Mr. Williamson.

"Forfeit!" cried Ward, so excited that he couldn't keep still. "It's noise."

"Well, let Margy tell her own answers to her own riddles, Ward," reproved Polly.

"How much is the forfeit to be?" asked Mr. Williamson.

"I don't think you ought to pay any," said Polly. "You gave us ten dollars, and that's enough."

"Oh, I want to pay a forfeit," Mr. Williamson insisted. "Like my daughter, I don't seem to be able to spell without thinking. Suppose we pay ten cents for the riddles we miss?"

The others were willing, so Mr. Williamson put ten cents on the silver tray.

"Mother," said Ward, at a sign from Polly, "What is the difference between a schoolmaster and an engineer?"

"One trains the mind, the other minds the train," answered Mrs. Larue, with a smile. "That was a pet riddle of mine years ago, Ward."

"I guess you told it to me," admitted Ward, "but I forgot."

"Ten cents for the collection," said Mr. Williamson, putting down a dime on the tray.

It was Jess's turn to ask her father.

"What is that which never asks questions, yet requires many answers?" asked Jess, eagerly.

"I should say a-a-a- oh, Jess, I'll pay ten cents

gladly for the answer," said Mr. Larue, placing two nickels with the other change.

"It's a doorbell," said Jess.

"Artie," nodded Polly. "Your turn."

"What mechanic never turns to the left, Mother?" he asked hopefully.

"The bricklayer?" she suggested.

"Forfeit!" cried Artie. "It's the wheelright."

Mrs. Marley paid her money and explained to Ward what a wheelright was, and then Fred was ready to tackle his mother.

"Bet you can't guess this, Mother," he said. "Of what trade were all the presidents of the United States?"

"Why, Fred, cabinet makers, of course," replied Mrs. Williamson.

"Here's the ten cents for you, Mother," said Mr. Williamson, gleefully. "I'm glad one of us solved a riddle."

"Polly's last," said Ward. "Go on, Polly, ask your dad."

"Why is an egg lightly boiled like one boiled too much, Daddy?" asked Polly, smiling.

"I know nothing about cooking," said Mr. Marley, pretending to frown. "Is it because you can't eat it?"

"Forfeit, Daddy!" cried Artie. "He's wrong, isn't he, Polly?"

"The answer is, 'Because it is hardly done,' " said Polly, holding out her hand for the ten cents.

They had planned to ask each other riddles, but when Mrs. Marley suggested they all go down to the kitchen and make molasses candy and cool it in the snow, the members of the Riddle Club decided that they had had enough riddles.

"We put our five dollars into the collection, so we are not being selfish," said Polly, soberly. "How much money have we for the poor family, Fred?"

"Counting the five dollars, we have five dollars and sixty cents," said Fred.

"That's fine!" said Polly and Jess together, and Mr. Larue added forty cents more to make the fund six dollars.

CHAPTER XX

MERRY CHRISTMAS

THE molasses candy was a great success and so was the school collection the next day. When Polly told Miss Elliott how they had collected the six dollars, the teacher thought it was such an interesting story that she asked Polly to tell it before the assembly. Polly was too shy, but Fred was persuaded, and when he had finished speaking, the principal had a few words to say.

"I'd like the Riddle Club to know," he said, "that we all admire their energy and generosity. They could have asked their parents for the money, but instead they held this novel meeting. And the girl who won the prize for the riddle could have kept the money for something else, but she chose to send it to girls who have nothing. To-day is the first time I have heard in detail of the Riddle Club, but I shall always remember it after this morning."

Dear, dear, wasn't the Riddle Club pleased and embarrassed and proud, all at once!

"Carrie Pepper looked as though she could cheerfully bite you, Polly," said Jess, at recess. "I don't believe she liked to hear us talked about that way."

"Oh, she's all right," said Polly. "If you don't look out, Jess, you'll be like Fred. He can't say one good thing about Carrie. I don't believe he even speaks to her now."

School closed two days before Christmas, and the party, which the entire school attended, was one long two hours of fun and laughter. Margy and Polly played their duet and there were recitations. A huge Christmas tree was trimmed entirely with things to eat. Popcorn and peanuts and strings of cranberries and doughnuts tied on with red ribbons, cookies strung together like necklaces, red apples, oranges cut in fancy shapes, net bags of candy, bars of chocolate done up to look like presents—that tree looked as any Christmas tree would look trimmed for a party, but there wasn't a single decoration on it that couldn't be eaten.

The children ate everything on it, too, before going home, and then it was carried out in the school yard and planted in the snow to serve as a dinner table for the birds. The older boys climbed it and fastened bits of suet to the highest branches, and Christmas morning those who

passed the yard saw flocks of hungry birds enjoying a holiday feast.

"We must fix Riddle Chap up for Christmas," suggested Polly, as they walked home after the party.

Riddle Chap had had his tree to hold long ago, but as Polly pointed out, there was nothing on it.

"He needs a cheerful necktie," Fred declared. "I'll get him that red one with purple spots that Daddy never wears."

"We'll put suet in the tree for the birds," said Jess. "They'll like that. And we can hang a wreath around his neck."

"We'll trim him all over!" cried Polly, joyously. "Give him a wreath and wind ground pine around his body and stick a holly spray in his hat."

They were as good as their word, and Riddle Chap, on Christmas Eve, was as gay as any snowman who ever had Christmas dreams. He wore a wreath about his throat, a fearfully bright necktie under his chin, holly in his hat, and his arms and legs were wound with ropes of ground pine.

Polly and Margy liked to consider themselves almost grown up—at times—and Fred was sure he was much older than Ward and Artie. Jess,

who was a year older than Margy, liked to romp too well to desire "grown-upness," as she called it. But when Christmas Eve came, each member of the Riddle Club discovered that hanging up one's stocking was half the fun of Christmas, and Polly and Margy and Fred were just as eager as Artie and Jess and Ward.

"Come over early," they told each other when they said good-night, after the snowman was arrayed. "Come over early and see our things."

Artie may have started for Ward's house—at least, that is what he always said he was doing, though his mother declared he must have been dreaming. Anyway, long before daylight, the Marley household was awakened by a tremendous crash.

Mr. and Mrs. Marley rushed out from their room, meeting Polly in the hall.

"Where's Artie?" she gasped.

"Here he is," called Artie, sweetly. "I guess I kind of fell downstairs. The globe fell off the lamp on the newel post."

Artie wasn't hurt—though it was a wonder, for the broken glass from the globe was strewn all around him—and he did not seem to be sleepy at all. Perhaps the fall had awakened him. However, his father said that no one was to think of

opening Christmas presents at half past three in the morning, and Artie had to go back to bed and wait till daylight for further excitement.

Just as soon as it was light, Artie and Polly were downstairs to examine their stockings. Whoever had filled them, knew exactly how the job should be done and Ward and Jess, and Margy and Fred, had the same report to make.

There were the red beads Polly wanted in the toe of hers; packed in among the candy and nuts in his, Artie found the jackknife he had long coveted; Ward, who had once said he never had enough to eat, was delighted with a stocking stuffed from toe to top with nothing but food of one sort or another; Jess found a new pair of gloves rolled up in hers, to take the place of the missing one. Margy had beads, too, only hers were blue; and Fred had a fountain pen with his initials on it in gold.

After the stockings came breakfast, and then it was time to see the larger presents. Later, Polly and Artie went to the Williamsons and helped Fred and Margy try on their new skates, then the four went to the Larues to help Jess and Ward admire the two new sleds, and then they all went back to the Marley house where Polly and Artie displayed a jumble of new skates, sweaters and muff and games and books that made one

wonder what these children would have left to wish for another Christmas.

"We'll all go to the post-office," said Polly. "The mail is in now."

And it was, a delightfully exciting mail which held cards and letters and packages for every one in the three families, from cousins and aunts and uncles who lived far away.

"Oh, my!" gasped Artie, when the packages were sorted out and he had his in his arms. "Look! Here's something from Mr. Kirby!"

Well, there was a package for each member of the Riddle Club from Mr. Kirby. They knew he had sent them, for his name and address were on the outside wrapper. Each box was exactly alike in shape and size. What *could* be in them?

"Let's open them," said Artie, sensibly.

There were a number of wrappers, and from the last one tumbled a small white box and a card that read, "With best Christmas wishes to Artie Marley, from his friends, Tony Kirby and Will Adams."

Each card said the same thing, substituting the various names of the Riddle Club members.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Polly, the moment she had opened her box. "How perfectly lovely!"

The little box was lined with blue velvet, and

on the blue velvet lay a gold signet ring. There were two letters engraved on the face. They were R.C. Polly lifted out the ring and turned it over. Inside it was engraved with her name and the date.

"And they fit!" said Margy, in surprise, as six rings were slipped on six fingers. "He must have asked our mothers what size we wear!"

And that was exactly what Mr. Kirby had done. He had written to find out what ring sizes to order, and the three mothers had kept his secret carefully.

"He gave us our lovely club pins, and now we have club rings," said Polly. "I never knew any one so nice!"

"Let's hurry and write him a letter right away, and Mrs. Williamson can take it to-morrow," suggested Artie.

Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were supposed to spend New Year's with the Kirbys in Rye, because they had not gone at Thanksgiving time. But Mrs. Williamson had discovered that she couldn't go away from home for New Year's Day, and now they were to leave the next day and have a little visit during holiday week. Fred and Margy were to stay with the Marleys while their parents were away.

The next morning, when Mr. and Mrs. Wil-

liamson set off for Rye, they carried a letter signed by all the Riddle Club members, thanking Mr. Kirby and Mr. Adams for their gifts and telling them how much happiness they had given.

"Gee, isn't it cold," said Fred, as the Williamson automobile disappeared around the turn in Elm Road. "I'll bet you it is thirty degrees below zero."

Mr. Larue overheard him and laughed.

"You wouldn't be standing there so complacently, Fred, if it were as cold as that," he said. "This is just good skating weather."

It was so cold and clear that Jess declared she saw "miles and miles" when she looked across the river, now frozen over. The ground was covered with snow, of course, and at every step this crunched under foot. When a wagon went past the wheels screeched, a sure sign of a cold day.

"Isn't it great!" bubbled Ward. "We have new skates and there'll be skating as soon as they get the river swept off; there isn't any school, so we can have all the fun we want; and there's good coasting, too, and some of us have new sleds. And I haven't eaten all my candy up, either," he added.

"You're one satisfied person," commented Fred,

blinking, for the sun on the snow was dazzling. "Let's go down and watch them sweep off the river. Maybe they won't let us on yet."

But "they" were willing for River Bend folk to go skating, for the ice was firm and thick. Later it would be cut to fill ice-houses, but as a rule the children could count on good skating through January. A group of men were busily at work this morning, with brooms, brushes and horse-drawn scrapers, taking the snow off the ice and getting it ready for the skaters. The sun was helping, too, and the Riddle Club members decided that by noon the river would be in fine condition.

"We're going up to the pond, Mother," said Polly, at the lunch table. "No, we'll not be cold. You never get cold skating."

"Don't be late for supper," cautioned Mrs. Marley. "And be sure you are dressed warmly. It will be much colder toward night."

"It's cold enough now," grumbled Margy, who would have liked to go skating in July, if that had been possible.

CHAPTER XXI

ANOTHER RACE

ALTHOUGH Margy refused to be enthusiastic about cold weather, nothing would induce her to miss a skating party. She could skate well, as indeed could nearly every child in River Bend. With a river at hand, it would have been strange if they had failed to learn as soon as they could buckle on their skates. The Riddle Club members could hardly remember the time when they had not gone skating.

"Wouldn't it have been a shame," said Fred, striking off up the ice with long, even swings, "if the first skating of the year had come while we had to go to school?"

"Yes, it would," agreed Ward. "I think they ought to cut out school in the winter, anyway. I don't mind it so much in March, because half the time it rains and you can't have much fun in the rain; but winter is the best time of year to be outdoors."

Ward looked as though he was thoroughly en-

joying himself. He was puffing slightly—he couldn't help getting out of breath when he exercised—but his eyes were beaming and he showed his even, white teeth in a delighted grin.

"I don't think it's as cold as it was," said Jess to Polly.

"That's because you've warmed up," declared Polly wisely. "I'm never cold when I'm skating."

"Just the same, it is warmer," insisted Jess.

"Sure it is," Fred flung over his shoulder. "It's turned warmer since we came out."

Though Polly had announced that they were going up to the pond, they did not start right away. The river was fairly well covered with skaters by this time, and presently a string of skaters appeared, seven boys and seven girls, each wearing a white woolly sweater with a large "C.C." stitched across the front.

"Look at the Conundrum Club!" cried Polly. "They have sweaters just alike. Do you suppose they're Christmas presents?"

The sweaters were Christmas gifts. Carrie herself told Polly, when she skated up a few minutes later and asked to see the Riddle Club rings.

"How did you know we had rings?" Polly asked, surprised.

"Oh, some girl told me," said Carrie. "I suppose they're plated. But the monogram is kind of nice, only I think signet rings are rather old fashioned, don't you?"

Polly wanted to laugh, for Carrie was trying the ring on as she spoke. Carrie seldom praised another's possessions, but it was easy to see that she admired the new ring.

"I say, Fred," called Joe Anderson, skating up, "let's have a race. Bet you I can beat you to the bend and back."

Margy pulled violently on Fred's sweater.

"Don't do it," she whispered. "He cheats! Remember the time you coasted?"

Fred did remember, but a challenge was a challenge.

"All right, I'll race you," he said shortly.

"Why don't we all race?" asked Carrie, shrilly. "Let's make it a Conundrum Club against the Riddle Club race."

"Go on—that will be fun!" cried some of the other boys and girls skating about the circle. "And the winners have to race again."

That was the way it was finally decided—that six of the Conundrum Club members should race the members of the Riddle Club. Joe Anderson chose the ones he wanted to represent the Conundrum Club—besides himself and Carrie, there

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were Mattie Helms, Albert Holms, Ben Asher and Stella Dorman.

"We'll line up and start when Edith counts three," said Joe, who, having planned the race, did not seem to think he was obliged, as a matter of courtesy, to consult the wishes of any one else.

Edith Spencer was a member of the Conundrum Club. She was a girl who easily became excited, and the first time she tried to count three she stuttered so badly that no one could tell what she was trying to say. The second time she did better and at the word "Three!" the skaters dashed off, Joe Anderson in the lead.

"I wish I was bigger!" thought Artie, skating bravely. "I'd like to win—but just the same if I can't beat that Albert Holmes, I'd like to know the reason!"

The bend in the river had been designated as the turning point, and Joe Anderson reached it first, with Fred close behind him. Fred was saving his speed for the spurt he wanted to make on the return way. Polly was ahead of Carrie and Mattie had just passed Margy when Jess stumbled and fell.

"Don't stop!" she cried, as Ward and Artie came up with her. "Go on! Hurry!"

But Ward and Artie pulled her to her feet, and then the three tried desperately to regain the

ground lost. It was too much of a handicap, however, and Albert Holmes and Ben Asher both came in ahead of Artie, who had set his heart on beating Albert.

It was almost a tie between Fred and Joe, and Polly was a half yard ahead of Carrie, so another race was planned between these four.

Fred had a plan all his own which he hoped would work. He had carefully refrained from fast skating in the first race, being contented to keep up with Joe. He knew that the second race would be harder, because he would not be as fresh. This time he was determined to skate at top speed.

At the signal they started, Polly in the lead. A flash passed her; it was Fred, head bent, eyes on his skates. Try as he would, Joe could not pass him, and Fred held his lead to the bend and back to the starting point, winning by a good yard.

"Well, anyway, Carrie beat Polly," said Stella Dorman, as Carrie shot in ahead of Polly, who had lost time in making the turn. "No one can say the Riddle Club skaters are better than we are."

Fred was satisfied to have it that way.

"Come on, we're going somewhere," he said, beckoning to his chums. "Race you again some time, Joe."

The Riddle Club waved good-bye and went on up the river. They skated more slowly now, for they were just a little tired from the excitement and the fast skating. Polly's cheeks were crimson and Ward was panting.

"Let's sit down a minute," suggested Jess. "I want to see if I skinned my knee when I fell down."

They skated into the shore and sat down on the bank. Jess discovered that her knee was not badly hurt, after all, and Ward was grateful for the rest.

"Looks like more snow," said Fred, pointing to the sky, now gray and overcast.

"Why can't you be cheerful?" scolded Margy. "We've had all the snow we want for a long time. It's going to be clear weather—the paper said so," and Margy looked triumphantly at her brother.

"You have to take the kind of weather you get," said Artie, sagely. "It doesn't make any difference what you want."

"Well, I don't think it's going to snow," announced Polly, rising. "Come on—if we're going to Jackson's Pond, we'd better get there. We haven't reached the fork, yet."

To reach the pond, it was necessary to skate to a point where the river forked. Two miles up



FRED HELD HIS LEAD, WINNING BY A YARD.

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this arm, one came to Jackson's Pond, a place much used for picnics in summer and the scene of evening skating parties in the winter. It had long been an ambition of Fred's to skate all the way to this pond, because he had always gone by automobile before.

The children skated steadily and soon reached the fork where they turned into the narrow "arm" that lay through a rather desolate country. There were no houses to be seen, but here and there smoke drifted from a chimney and indicated the presence of a farm.

"I wouldn't like to live up here, would you?" said Artie.

"No, River Bend is much nicer," agreed Jess.

"Still, we could skate to school if we lived here," suggested Polly. "That must be the schoolhouse over there."

She pointed to a small building set in a fenced yard. There was a flag pole, but no flag was flying.

"Closed for the holidays," commented Fred. "There! Who said it wasn't going to snow?" he added triumphantly.

A stinging wet flake struck Margy's upturned face.

"It's just a flurry," she said comfortably.

"Perhaps we'd better turn around and go

back," said Polly. "We'll be skating against the wind, anyway, and it will take us longer to get home than it has to come."

"Oh, come on, we want to be able to say we've skated as far as the pond," urged Fred. "You're not afraid of a little snow, are you, Polly?"

"No, I'm not, but I don't want to be caught in a big storm, miles away from any house," said Polly, sensibly.

"This won't be a big storm," declared Artie.

But the snow continued to come faster and the wind rose, growling.

"I wonder if it's late?" said Margy, suddenly.

"No, it can't be," answered Fred. "We started right after lunch, and it was only half past twelve."

A sudden gust of wind struck Margy sharply in the face.

"It's so dark!" she gasped, swallowing a mouthful of snow.

And it was dark. The clouds were heavy and they seemed so near that Jess was sure she could touch them. The wind had risen steadily, and as the six children rounded a bend in the stream, it caught them full force.

"I can't breathe!" screamed Jess, in a sudden panic.

"Turn around!" shouted Fred.

They turned their backs to the storm and waited a moment.

"There's no use trying to go back," cried Fred to Polly, as another gust of wind swooped upon them. "It's blowing from all directions at once. We'd better try to get in somewhere."

"Is it a blizzard?" asked Jess.

"It's a storm," said Fred, trying to speak cheerfully. "Come on, we'll take off our skates and walk. There's no use trying to skate in a wind like this."

They managed to get their skates off, and then climbed the low bank.

"We'll follow the river," Fred decided, "because if we get back in the country we might get lost."

Fred was a very comforting person to have around when things didn't go right, Polly thought, trudging after him. He could always think of something to do, and his plans were usually good. Instead of being undecided, or standing around in the teeth of the wind while he thought of what they should do, he kept them moving, and moving was so much better than standing still. You felt as though you were going toward help, at least.

"Do you see anything over there, Ward?" Fred shouted, suddenly, breaking in on Polly's thoughts.

"Where?" cried Ward, peering through the whirling film of snow.

"There—across the river," answered Fred, pointing.

Ward stared. Yes, the dim outlines of a building certainly could be seen.

"It's a house!" shouted Fred. "We'll have to cross over."

"I hope they have some kind of a fire. I'm almost frozen stiff!" muttered Margy.

CHAPTER XXII

CAUGHT IN A STORM

THE boys helped the three girls down the bank and, slipping and sliding, they made their way across the river to the other side. Scrambling up this bank, they found the building was further back than they had supposed.

"I'm so co-old!" shivered Margy. "I don't see any smoke coming out of a chimney. I don't believe any one lives there."

"I don't see any chimney," declared Ward, trying to brush the snow away from before his face so that he could see clearly—a hopeless task.

"Well, some one must live there," said Fred, impatiently. "Hurry up, or we'll freeze standing here."

It was dark now, and they were stiff and tired. Their clothes were damp and their gloves soaked through. Worse still, they were hungry, and Artie, who had often sighed to be an explorer, began to wonder whether he was going to starve to death in the snow.

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Fred led the way toward the building and the others followed him, longing for the sight of a bright fire and a lighted lamp. The ground was humpy, and Margy began to cry when she fell down.

"I'm so tired," she sniffed, as Polly pulled her up. "If any one lives in that house they're not at home, because it's dark."

"Perhaps there's a light at the back," said Fred. "Maybe they only have a light in the kitchen."

"Do you know what I think, Fred?" called Polly, raising her voice above the wind which still buffeted them unmercifully. "I think that is a barn! It doesn't look like a house to me."

"If it's a barn, that means there's a house near here," shouted Fred. "That's good luck."

But when they had reached the barn—for it was a barn, after all—another disappointment awaited them. The building was open on both sides, and the wind swept through the wide doorways and hurled the snow into the corners, where it lay in heaps.

The barn was an old one, evidently abandoned years before!

"Come on in," said Fred, refusing to be discouraged. "It can't be as cold as it is outside. And because the barn isn't used is no sign there

isn't a house near. There must be a house!"

The six forlorn chums stepped inside the dark doorway and found themselves in a cavern, or so it seemed to them.

"Be careful," warned Polly. "Some of the boards may be rotten and we might step through them, or fall into a hole."

They felt their way carefully, following the wall, till they were well back from the doorway through which they had entered. Protected in a measure from the wind, they felt warmer at once.

"You stand still," commanded Fred. "I'm going over to that other doorway and look out."

He felt his way around slowly, and when he felt the wind blow full in his face he knew he had reached the other doorway.

"Say, I see a light!" he called to the others. "A little light, and that must be in a house. It looks a mile away, but I'll bet you it is a house."

"I won't go another step," declared Margy, sitting down on the floor. "Not another step. I'm too tired to move."

"But you'll freeze here," said Polly. "Won't she, Fred?"

"I'd just as lief freeze as to break my leg walking over that humpy ground again," retorted Margy, bitterly.

"Well, I'd rather stay here, too," announced Jess. "You don't know positively that that light is in a house. And if it is in a house, it may be miles and miles away. I'd rather stay here till morning."

They were all so tired and cold that a quarrel might easily have developed, had not Polly proposed a plan.

"I tell you what let's do," she said good-temperedly. "Let Jess and Margy stay here and Ward and Artie take care of them; then I'll go with you, Fred, and we'll see if that light is in a house. Perhaps we'll find the house that goes with this barn first, and that will be nearer."

Ward and Artie wanted to go with Polly and Fred, but were finally persuaded to remain with the two girls.

"Don't stay all night," begged Artie, as Polly whispered to him to be good and not let Margy get frightened.

"Say, Polly, you're all right," Fred told her, striking off in the direction of the twinkling light. "I know you're dead tired and cold, too, but you don't grunt. Uh!" and Fred gave a grunt himself.

"What's the matter?" cried Polly, anxiously. "What is it, Fred?"

"I walked into something," said Fred.

"Nearly knocked my teeth out. Don't know what it is, but it feels like a tower of some sort."

"I know," cried Polly, feeling the "tower." "It's one of the brick foundations of a porch, Fred. Feel the loose bricks under the snow? This is probably where the house that goes with that old barn stood, and it either burned down or fell down."

"I guess you're right," said Fred. "See, here's the cellar. I won't grumble because I walked into that column of bricks—if I hadn't we might have both stepped into that cellar, and that wouldn't have been any fun."

Carefully and feeling each step of the way, they skirted the open cellar. The wind and the snow made going very slow, and the twinkling light seemed to come no nearer.

"Want to stop and get your breath, Polly?" asked Fred, a little anxiously, when they had been walking some minutes in silence.

"I'm—all—right," gasped Polly. "But I've got my scarf tied over my mouth to keep the wind out. I can't talk."

They plodded on after that, and to Fred's delight the light came nearer and nearer at last. Soon they could see that it shone from the window of a house and streamed feebly out on a broken picket fence.

"At least they're at home," said Fred, thankfully. "You can stay and get warm, Polly, and I'll go back and get the others."

He was sure their troubles were over, and he rapped loudly on the door with visions of a hot supper dancing before his eyes.

No one answered his knock, and he rapped again. Still silence.

"We'll both knock," said Polly, and the two of them beat a tattoo on the door.

"Some one's coming," whispered Polly. "Hark!"

They heard a bolt drawn back and a key in the lock turned. Then the door opened slowly and an old woman peered out.

"Who's there?" she asked. "What do you want?"

"Please, we're caught in the storm," said Polly. "May we come in and get warm?"

"Why, you're children!" said the old woman, in astonishment. "Come in—come in. Though you can't get warm, I'm thinking. I got out of bed to answer your knock, and there's no wood in the house to make a fire."

She opened the door wider and beckoned them to come in. They saw a square room, neatly furnished and evidently used as a combination sitting room and kitchen.

"You must be chilled through," said the old woman. "I can fix a fire for you, if this boy will go out to the woodshed and get some wood; there's plenty cut there, but I couldn't go out in the storm. My rheumatism took me this afternoon, and I had to go to bed."

"There are four more of us, waiting in a barn," explained Polly, as Fred went out to find the woodshed, carrying a lantern the old woman gave him. "We were out skating this afternoon and lost our way."

"Dear, dear, you must be hungry, too! Now, if you could cook, there's eggs in that bowl on the shelf and bread and butter and jam a-plenty. I have cold baked beans left over, too."

The old woman could hardly walk, and Polly said at once that she would cook the eggs.

"Then let your brother build up a good fire and put a kettle of water on to heat, and you set the table and get the supper ready. I'll tell you where to find things. I declare, I feel better already, having some one to talk to. And that fire feels good, too. I won't be caught this way again; I'll fill up my woodbox when I have a chance, and then when I'm flat on my back I won't have to worry."

Fred built a roaring fire in the stove, filled the woodbox, and then, not stopping to dry his gloves

—to say nothing of his shoes, which were soaked through—he set off to the barn to bring the rest back with him.

While he was gone, Polly first made some tea and boiled an egg for their kind hostess. Then she set the table at the old woman's directions, told her who they were and explained about the Riddle Club and that Fred was not her brother. She cut the bread and scrambled the eggs, and when Fred and the others returned they found a cheerful picture awaiting them—a warm kitchen and a table set with six bowls of milk and a mound of bread already buttered, not to mention a pan of baked beans, the reddest of red currant jam, and the yellowest of golden eggs sizzling in a pan on the stove.

"Take off your wet things," ordered the old woman. "I guess I have enough bedroom slippers to go round. I have ten nieces, and every blessed one of them has, at some time or other, knit me a pair of bedroom slippers. They don't seem to think I wear anything else."

The girls and boys laughed, but when they had taken off their heavy, wet shoes, the red and pink and blue and purple wool knitted slippers felt very cozy and warm to their tired feet. Their gloves and mittens were hung on a line behind the stove and the shoes arranged in a row on the hearth,

and then they sat down to enjoy their belated supper.

"I suppose your folks will be worried to death about you, but we can't help it," said the old woman. Her name, she told them, was Mrs. Wicks. "There's a telephone in a house about half a mile away, but a storm like this always breaks down the wires, even if you were fit to go out again to-night, which you're not. I never saw a storm come up quicker than this one did, and it's lucky for me you came along. I haven't a fancy to have a rheumatic attack and no wood for a fire in the house."

Artie and Ward went to sleep at the table, and that brought up the question of where they were to sleep.

"I've got two bedrooms, besides mine," said Mrs. Wicks. "But they haven't been used this winter. I'm afraid they're damp."

"That will be all right," said Polly, politely.

"No, it won't be all right," declared Mrs. Wicks, with vigor. "I don't aim to have you take cold, sleeping in damp sheets. I can't get the things out, but you go in and bring the sheets and blankets off those two beds and hang 'em on chairs before the fire; that will dry them. You can put the two little fellows on my bed till theirs is ready."

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But neither Polly nor Fred would hear to this, so Artie and Ward were finally shaken awake and set to work carrying out blankets while the girls washed the dishes. Mrs. Wicks had had a nap before their arrival, and she was enjoying herself, but Polly and Margy confided to each other that never, never, never had they been half so tired and sleepy.

Finally the blankets and sheets were pronounced dry, the beds made up again, and, leaning on Fred and Polly, Mrs. Wicks hobbled to her own room. In two minutes after they had lain down, the six members of the Riddle Club were fast asleep, and though the wind howled all night and shook the windows and rattled loose shutters, not a sound did they hear.

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. WICKS

POLLY was the first to wake in the morning. She opened one eye sleepily, saw her dress hanging over a chair back, caught a glimpse of unfamiliar wall paper on the side of the room, and sat up with a jerk.

"What's the matter?" asked Jess, drowsily.

"Oh!" said Polly. "I remember now. We're here. Say, Jess, it must be late; the sun is shining."

"Then it's stopped snowing," said Jess. "We can go home. Let's get dressed in a jiffy."

Margy woke up, and it did not take the three girls long to dress, for they had slept in their underclothes, having removed only their dresses and stockings.

Polly peeped out into the kitchen and saw Fred pumping water at the sink.

"Want to wash your face?" he whispered. "Here's a towel. It's stopped snowing, but you ought to see the snow!"

Polly stood on tiptoe to glance out of the window over the sink. The sun was dazzling, and trees and fences and outbuildings were plastered with drifts of snow, flung against them by the wind.

"Isn't it pretty!" cried Polly, in delight.

"It won't be so pretty to walk home," said Ward, who joined them.

"Are you children up?" called Mrs. Wicks. "I wish one of you girls would help me get dressed. My knee isn't any worse, but then it isn't any better."

"I'll help her," offered Margy, hastily. "You build the fire, Fred, because it's freezing cold in this kitchen."

Fred and Artie went out to get more wood, for Fred suggested that they leave the woodbox untouched, and Margy went to help the old woman get dressed.

By the time she was ready, the kitchen was warm and Polly and Jess set the breakfast table, while Mrs. Wicks stirred up griddle cakes and showed them how to make oatmeal.

"The man on the next farm always brings me milk," the old lady explained, "and it shows how deep the snow must be, if he can't get here. It's lucky I have some milk left from yesterday."

They had a cheerful breakfast, and when it

was over Polly asked if there wasn't something they could do to help.

"We can't walk home through the snow while it is as deep as this," she said sensibly, "and perhaps we can help you, if you'll tell us how. What would you do if you weren't lame this morning?"

"I'd feed my chickens and shovel some paths around the house and down to the mail-box," said Mrs. Wicks, promptly. "Then I'd sit down and sew."

Fred and Artie and Ward said they could do the outdoor work, and they went at it with a will. Though before that they found that their shoes were so stiff it wasn't easy to get them on. But Mrs. Wicks brought out some grease and showed them how to rub it in, and that made the leather pliable again. Fred did the girls' shoes for them, and Margy was especially grateful, for she loved to be comfortable and she had been dreading to put on her stiffened shoes.

The three girls washed and dried the dishes, swept and straightened up the kitchen, made the beds and watered the geranium that Mrs. Wicks said couldn't be killed, for no matter how cold the kitchen was, it lived, winter after winter, if protected by a paper at night.

"I wish you'd come and live with me all win-

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ter," the old lady said, when Ward brought in six eggs he had found in the henhouse and Fred and Artie reported that a path had been swept out to the mail-box. "I like company. One of my nieces comes to stay with me part of the time, and she's coming the day after New Year's. But she isn't young like you."

Fred asked about the barn in which they had stayed, and Mrs. Wicks told them that the place had once been a prosperous farm.

"The house burned down one summer, and the people farmed it for a time, living in the barn and using it as a house," she said. "Then they sold the place and moved away, and the new owner never did anything with it. One by one the outbuildings fell to pieces, and they say one good wind will blow the barn over, if it gets it in the right corner."

"There's rats in it!" shuddered Margy. "I was sitting on the floor last night, waiting for Fred to come back, and a horrid rat ran right across my lap!"

"She let out a yell that could be heard in River Bend," said Ward, grinning. "And then she rolled around and wouldn't come back. Fred found her standing in the snow, crying."

"Well, I'd cry, too, if a rat ran over me," said Jess, stoutly. "Ugly, horrid things!"

Mrs. Wicks got out her box of patchwork and showed the gay colored patches to her visitors. Like many lonely old ladies, she was fond of telling stories about her girlhood, and with a brand new audience the temptation was too great to be resisted.

"You girls don't sew patchwork nowadays, do you?" she asked, smiling.

"We can knit," offered Polly, apologetically. "But none of us ever made a quilt. My grandmother did, when she was a little girl, though."

"Ward speaking of the rat that frightened Margy, reminded me of a scare I had when I was a little girl," said Mrs. Wicks.

"I had gone to visit my Aunt Deborah, of whom I was very fond. Aunt had a son, about sixteen—I was then eleven—and, dear me, what a tease Coburn was! He called me 'Miss Prim' and pulled my hair whenever he had a chance. I was supposed to sew on my patchwork every afternoon, even when visiting, and Coburn thought that a girl cousin who spent hours sewing wasn't much fun to have around. He would have liked me to be a boy cousin and climb trees with him."

"But we girls climb trees!" put in Jess. But Mrs. Wicks paid no attention to the remark, and went on with her story.

"Well, I was sitting quietly with my little sewing basket one afternoon, in the parlor window. Aunt Deborah kept the parlor tightly closed most of the time, and there must have been some special reason why I was allowed to sit there and sew, but I don't recall it. Perhaps because I was company. The parlor window overlooked the road, and, girl-like, I was interested in the various teams that drove past. I liked to see what people were doing as much as any one. Coburn wasn't anywhere around, and Aunt Deborah was still upstairs finishing her nap.

"A spic and span, shiny new buggy went past with a girl dressed in white driving, and I leaned forward to look, at the same time putting out my hand to take a spool of thread from the basket. I felt something move under my hand, but I thought it was the spool of thread rolling from my fingers. Unconsciously I took a firmer clutch, and something squeaked. I had picked up a little white mouse!"

"Ugh! How awful! Didn't you scream?" asked Margy.

"Scream! I should think I did!" returned Mrs. Wicks, smiling at the recollection. "To my startled eyes that basket seemed alive with white mice, and I threw it across the room in one direc-

tion and my patchwork and thimble in another. Then I fled, still screaming.

"Aunt Deborah came downstairs on the run, and Coburn mysteriously appeared from some secret place. He caught me as I came rushing out of the door and, with some difficulty, calmed me. I think he was a little frightened, for I couldn't stop crying at first and nothing would induce me to go into the parlor or touch my work basket again. Aunt Deborah made Coburn pick up the scattered spools and put the basket in order. As for his three pet mice, no one ever knew what became of them—they may have run off to live with their relations. Anyway, they never came back and Aunt Deborah declared it served Coburn right for playing such a trick."

Margy said that she thought mice were the worst animals that ever lived, except rats, while Fred contended that mice were all right when you knew them. This started an argument that lasted till Mrs. Wicks suggested they go down to the mail-box and see if the postman had got through the drifts.

"If we'd only brought our sleds, instead of the skates, we could get home," said Ward.

"But it wasn't snowing when we left," said

Polly. "Oh, dear, I do hope the folks aren't worrying about us."

"If we had some snowshoes, we could walk home, on top of the snow," said Artie. "Why couldn't we make some?"

"Out of what?" asked Fred, promptly.

"Barrel staves," replied Artie.

"I think stilts would be better," declared Ward. "Stilts would hold us up, out of the drifts."

"Snowshoes are what we need," decreed Fred. "Perhaps we could make them out of barrels. Let's see if Mrs. Wicks has any barrels she doesn't want."

"Barrels?" said Mrs. Wicks, when they asked her. "Oh, my, yes! plenty of barrels out in the woodshed. Do anything you like with them."

With the three girls as interested, if not hopeful, spectators (Polly was sure she couldn't walk on snowshoes after they were made and Margy said frankly she didn't think they would ever be made) the boys ripped two barrels apart and sandpapered the staves. The sandpaper was worn pretty smooth—it was all Mrs. Wicks had—and the staves were remarkably rough, but they did the best they could.

"You try them first, Fred," suggested Artie. "How are you going to keep these snowshoes on?"

"Skate straps," said Fred, briefly.

He managed to strap a stave to each of his feet, using his skate straps, and then, slowly and gingerly, stepped out of the woodshed.

"The way to walk on snowshoes," he announced, "is not to lift your feet and put 'em down again. You glide along."

"All right, let's see you glide," said Artie, eagerly.

Fred struck out with what he fondly believed to be a gliding motion. He sunk one foot deeply into the snow, balanced there a precarious moment with his other foot waving wildly in the air and then crashed over into a handy drift.

"Of course there's a knack in getting used to them," he gasped, as the others pulled him out. "I'll get it after a while."

"Well, if I have to walk on those things to get home, I'm going to stay here," said Jess.

"There's the postman!" cried Margy. "Look, he's putting something in the box!"

They ran down the path they had shoveled, Fred discarding his "snowshoes" as hindrances, and found the postman to be a jolly person wrapped in many mufflers and driving a large white horse harnessed to an old-fashioned sleigh.

"Say, there's some one looking for you kids," he said, as soon as he saw the children. "I met

a team about a mile back, two men in a sleigh. They asked me if I'd seen anything of three boys and three girls. And then I hadn't, and told them so."

"Daddy!" cried Polly. "It must be Daddy and Mr. Larue. Whereabouts did you see them?"

"They were following this road," said the postman. "Looks like them coming now. I've had to make so many stops I guess they've caught up with me. Yes, they're waving to you. See 'em?"

CHAPTER XXIV

HOME AGAIN

THE children needed no snowshoes to lend them speed as they ran down the road. Driving toward them were Mr. Marley and Mr. Larue in a sleigh drawn by a horse Fred recognized as "Old Tom," one of Mr. Davis's horses.

"Well, you certainly have upset the family," said Mr. Marley, as Artie hurled himself into his lap and the others tried to find a place on the runners.

"Did Mother worry?" asked Polly, anxiously. "We were all right, only we couldn't get home."

"Of course we worried," answered Mr. Marley. "I don't think any one has had a wink of sleep all night. We went up the river as far as Jackson's Pond, hunting for you, but the wind forced us to give up there."

"Where did you spend the night?" asked Mr. Larue, his arm around Jess.

"Oh, we stayed at Mrs. Wicks' house," said Ward, cheerfully.

"And who is Mrs. Wicks?" asked Mr. Larue, in surprise.

"She's an old lady—she lives there," said Polly, pointing to the house. "She had rheumatism in her knee, but she told us what to do and we had good things to eat and everything was lovely."

"Except staying in the barn," amended Margy. "A rat ran over me, Mr. Marley."

"We'll drive on to Mrs. Wicks' house," said Mr. Marley, "and thank her for her kindness. I don't suppose she has a telephone, and if she had, the wires would probably be down. I'd like to tell the worried mothers that we have found you, safe and sound."

Mrs. Wicks hobbled to the door to greet her visitors. She seemed delighted to have more company, and she would not hear of their starting back before she had cooked dinner for them.

Mr. Marley and Mr. Larue knew that she spoke wisely. The roads were badly drifted and, in spite of the sunshine, it was bitingly cold. If they had dinner before they started, the ride would be much more comfortable for them all.

So they said they would stay, and Mrs. Wicks hobbled about, delighted to have what she called "a full table."

"It's something like!" she said, when they sat down three-quarters of an hour later to a steam-

ing hot dinner. "Something like, to have nine at the table."

While the girls helped her with the dishes—for anxious as the fathers were to start home they would not leave the old lady with all the extra work to do alone—the boys carried in a great pile of wood, filling the woodbox to overflowing and stacking the sticks on the floor beside it. They fed and watered the chickens, so that a trip out to the henhouse that night would be unnecessary, saw that the lamps were filled, went down to the road to get the milk the neighboring farmer finally brought, and so left Mrs. Wicks assured of a comfortable night.

"We could have brought her home with us, I suppose," said Mr. Marley, as he tucked the children in under the heavy robes, "but she wouldn't be happy away from her own home. And she says her niece is coming in a few days to stay with her for the rest of the winter. But we mustn't forget her. We'll have to come and see her, often."

"She isn't poor, is she, Daddy?" asked Polly, thoughtfully, cuddling up to the heated brick Mrs. Wicks had given her.

The old lady had filled the bottom of the sleigh with hot bricks, wrapped in burlap. They were as good as stoves, the children declared.

"No, Mrs. Wicks isn't poor—not what we call poor," answered Mr. Marley, who was driving. "She has money enough to live on and owns her house, she tells me. But she is lonely, and sometimes people need friends more than they need money."

The dazzling sunshine made the fields and laden trees very beautiful to see, but there was a cold wind, and the snow seemed to have melted very little. For some distance the traveling was fairly good, for the postman's sleigh had broken the road, but when they turned into another road, unbroken drifts confronted them.

"This ought to save us a mile, so I think it's worth trying," said Mr. Marley, as the horse began to flounder. "The way we came was the longer, but we were following the river to find the children."

Old Tom didn't care if the road was a shorter one. He didn't like the big drifts, and he saw no reason why he should pretend he did. He shook his head and snorted and finally stood still.

"We'll have to get out and encourage him," said Mr. Larue, cheerfully. "You stay in, Marley, and the boys and I will show old Tom how easy it is to wade through snow, if you make up your mind it can be done."

Mr. Larue got out and the six chums tumbled after him. The girls begged to help, too, for they were cramped from sitting under the robes. The sleigh was pretty well filled when they were all in it.

"Gee, it is deep, isn't it!" exclaimed Artie, as he went in to his waist. "But look at that bare spot, over there on the field!"

"That's what the wind did," Mr. Larue explained. "It blew all the drifts over into this road and left the fields lightly covered."

"Why don't we drive over the fields then?" asked Fred.

"That isn't such a bad idea, Fred," called Mr. Marley, who had overheard. "I'll see if I can turn old Tom and get through the ditch."

"Easy on the turn," cautioned Mr. Larue. "The deepest snow is there in the ditch."

"You'll tip over!" cried Margy, in alarm. "Do be careful, Mr. Marley!"

Mr. Marley laughed and promised not to tip the sleigh over. He turned the horse's head toward the ditch and called to him encouragingly. Old Tom merely shook his ears.

"Doesn't want to try it," said Mr. Larue. "I'll see if I can lead him. Here, boy, you're all right. Come on, that's a good fellow."

Talking soothingly to the horse, Mr. Larue took hold of the bridle and pulled gently. The horse pulled also, but the other way.

"He won't go. Try taking him straight ahead," Mr. Marley advised. "Look out, Polly—you're standing in the way."

Polly took a step backward, lost her balance, and went over full-length into a beautiful snow bank. Her feet, coming up with such startling suddenness were too much for old Tom. With a wild snort he started forward, nearly pulling Mr. Marley from the seat. Plunging and panting, the horse plowed ahead, and in a few minutes had worked his way out of the worst of the drifts.

"Polly! are you all right?" cried Margy, rushing to her chum's rescue.

"I guess so," said Polly, a little uncertainly. "Where's the horse and sleigh?" she asked, in surprise, as Fred and Margy pulled her out and set her on her feet.

"All right, Polly?" asked Mr. Larue, hurrying up. "Yes, you seem to be. Well, that certainly was a novel way to persuade a horse, but it seems to have given us results."

Polly had to laugh when she heard that her tumble had made old Tom change his mind. She said she wasn't willing to fall over all the rest

of the way home, though; but her father said he didn't think it would be necessary.

They climbed into the sleigh again, warm and rosy from their tramping in the drifts, and old Tom started off as though he had made up his mind to do his best without further protest.

This time Mr. Larue drove, for Mr. Marley's hands were stiff from the cold. Though old Tom was willing, they could not drive fast, and before they reached the stretch of state road that would take them to River Bend, the heat had gone from the bricks provided by Mrs. Wicks and Margy was crying with cold. Polly and Jess were far from comfortable, but they and the boys were determined to "stick it out."

"Say, Larue, these youngsters are purple with cold," said Mr. Marley, suddenly. "We'll have to stop for a moment and give them some exercise."

Margy didn't want to move, but Mr. Marley lifted her out and put her down in the road. The rest followed, and Mr. Larue tied old Tom to a tree.

"Now we have to run," said Mr. Marley. "From the sleigh to that big maple tree and back, six times. No one can beg off, and the sooner you get through with it, the quicker we'll be home."

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Margy's feet were like lead and Polly was sure she had no feet at all. The tree was some distance from the sleigh, and the prospect of running there and back six times loomed like an impossible task. However, Mr. Marley started off, and they could do no less than follow.

"I know my feet are broken off!" thought Polly, limping along. "I won't look, but I know they're gone. My mother will be sorry if I come home without any feet."

Behind her, Margy was still crying, wiping her eyes on her glove as she tried to run. The boys kept at it doggedly, their eyes on the ground.

When she had touched the tree three times, Polly made an interesting discovery—her feet were where they ought to be, right in her shoes. Better, they felt comfortable, and even warm.

By the time they had completed the six trips, every one was in a glow—even Margy was smiling.

"Now another hour, and we'll be home," said Mr. Marley. "Tumble in, children, and we'll be home before you know it."

The state road provided much easier going. There had been more travel over it since the storm, and occasionally they passed a sleigh or a motor truck. But the horse was sadly tired before they came to River Bend, and they found it

easy to believe when reports came in from the surrounding country that the storm had been the worst, from the point of view of blocking traffic, that the country had experienced in years.

"Are you frozen? Are you hungry? Where on earth did you stay all night? Are you sure you haven't frozen your ears or your toes?" cried the two mothers together, flying down the steps as the sleigh at last drew up before the Marley house.

And even after they had heard the story and assured themselves that none of the six had suffered from hunger or exposure, the mothers couldn't rest. They heard the story over and over again, and Mrs. Marley made her husband promise to take her to see Mrs. Wicks as soon as the roads were fairly open. Mrs. Larue said she would go, too, and long after the children were in bed they sat up planning the kind of box they would pack and what they would put in it to please the old lady.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAST OF THE SNOWMAN

IT seemed like another Christmas to the members of the Riddle Club, the day after their experience in getting home. Every one was so glad to see them that they were allowed to please themselves pretty much, till Ward made himself sick with too much candy and Margy and Fred quarreled because they wanted to go skating and coasting at the same time; that is, each wanted the other to do his or her way.

"Say, it's beginning to melt," Fred reported, coming into the house for lunch. "I hear it drip!"

Mrs. Marley had invited Jess and Ward, and the six chums were together at the table.

"Thawing!" cried Polly. "It will spoil the skating."

"But it will take a lot to spoil the coasting," said Artie. "Let's go this afternoon."

Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were expected back on New Year's Day, early in the morning, so

Fred and Margy were still staying with the Marleys.

As soon as lunch was over, they got the sleds out and set off for the hill.

"Gee, when it begins to melt, it sure does start!" observed Ward.

Little rivers of water were running off the roofs and householders were out opening the gutters.

"It's the January thaw," said Margy, wisely.

"It isn't January till to-morrow," retorted Jess.

"Does it always thaw in January?" asked Artie, athirst for information.

"Yes, of course," said Margy. "Some time in January it will thaw. Always. Mattie Helms told me."

"Well, I guess it thaws some time in every month," declared Fred. "Every winter month, that is," he added, remembering the changing seasons.

"Well, this is the January thaw," insisted Margy. "It will be January to-morrow, and so it is really time."

When they reached the hill, they found a number of coasters, though it was more slush than snow. The runners sent up fine streams of water as the sleds raced down, and in the ditches on

either side of the road a rushing stream of snow water was pouring.

"Maybe it's spring," gasped Jess, as a splash of water struck her in the face.

"No, we'll have lots more snow and ice yet," said Fred. "But I don't call this much fun, do you? Let's go home and go up in the clubroom."

They were half-soaked already, and no one made any objections to returning home. Mrs. Marley made them take off their wet shoes and put on dry ones, and then they went upstairs to play parcheesi in the clubroom.

"There won't be much left of Riddle Chap after this," remarked Polly, happening to glance from the window while waiting her turn to play.

"Say, he has gone down, hasn't he?" said Jess, in surprise.

"He's wasting away," giggled Polly. "Poor old Riddle Chap! But he's had a pretty long life for a snowman."

The poor snowman was visibly melting. Trickles of water ran over him and he seemed to be sinking into the ground.

"I'll be glad when he's gone," said Jess. "He brought me bad luck—made me lose my glove."

"There's no such thing as good luck or bad luck," declared Fred. "You lost your glove be-

cause you didn't take care of it. Don't blame that on poor old Riddle Chap."

"Don't you call it bad luck that you lost the bank?" asked Jess, heedless of Polly's warning frown.

"No, of course that wasn't bad luck," said Fred, stoutly. "That was my own fault. I put it down somewhere, but I'll never tell you where. And Dad wanted me to open a savings-bank account with it, too. I ought to have taken his advice."

"You haven't lost the new bank," said Artie, who meant to be comforting.

"No, I haven't," agreed Fred. "And that isn't good luck, either. It's good care. I look at the bank first thing every night and morning, to make sure it is in the right place."

"Perhaps some one took the other bank," suggested Margy.

Fred glanced at her sharply. She was watching the board and apparently had just said that without thinking.

"I don't see how any one could have taken it," said Fred, and then it was his turn to play.

He still thought, now and then, that Carrie Pepper knew more about the bank than she cared to tell. But Fred had made up his mind not to

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say anything until he had more than suspicions to back him, and he resolutely refused to put his thought into words.

That night it turned a little colder, as it usually does, and the melting snow froze in little lace ruffles on the edges of the roofs. Riddle Chap had an icicle on what was left of his nose, and Polly was hopeful that he would stay as he was and not shrink any more. Alas! New Year's Day dawned with a burst of sunlight that started the little streams running again, turned the coasting hill to a sea of slush, and hastened the sure disappearance of the once handsome Riddle Chap.

"It's a good thing we have his picture," said Polly, mournfully, at breakfast.

"You can build another snowman, when another snow comes," said Mr. Marley, cheerfully.

But Polly said it wouldn't be Riddle Chap, and of course no one could deny that.

However, it was impossible to feel sober on such a bright morning, and "Happy New Year!" sounded up and down Elm Road as the children greeted each other. School would open the day after to-morrow, and they were determined to have as much fun as possible before the holidays were definitely over.

Breakfast was barely finished when the Wil-

Williamson car came down the road, bringing Mr. and Mrs. Williamson back to their home. They had much to tell about their visit in Rye and messages from "the old hermit," as the youngsters still called Mr. Field, as well as from his sister, whom they had never seen, but who knew them quite well through Mr. Kirby's and Mr. Adams' descriptions. The two cousins had sent a large box of chocolates to be shared by the six chums.

"Mother thinks," said Mr. Williamson, watching Artie trying to swallow a chocolate covered cherry that threatened to drown him in syrup, "that, since it is so warm to-day, we might drive out and see Mrs. Wicks."

"Come on! Let's go!" cried Fred. "We'll take her some of the chocolates—maybe she likes candy."

Mr. Williamson laughed.

"I don't doubt it," he said. "But, Fred, stop and consider the car a moment. It is a seven-passenger, but how am I going to pack twelve into the space reserved for seven?"

"It would be kind of crowded," admitted Fred. "I'm willing to stay at home, Dad. Let the others go."

"Suppose we arrange it this way," said Mrs. Williamson: "You children all stay at home this time—you'll find plenty to do to amuse your-

selves. We won't go till after lunch and we'll be back in time for supper. We feel that we'd like to visit with Mrs. Wicks and take her a little something, and it really wouldn't be very interesting for you. Then next time Daddy will take the whole Riddle Club, and we grown-ups will stay at home."

So that was the way the plan was finally made, and after an early lunch the fathers and mothers drove off with baskets and boxes of goodies for Mrs. Wicks, including some of the delicious chocolates the children had insisted on sending her.

"Let's tip old Riddle Chap over," proposed Artie, aching for a little exercise. "There's no use in waiting for him to melt away. Doesn't he look seedy, though?"

In truth, the old snowman did look seedy. He had long ago lost his hat and his pine tree lay on the ground at his feet. Gone were the letters, R.C. In fact, he looked like a regular tramp of a snowman.

"One, two, three!" called Fred, as the boys leaned against the rapidly melting wreck.

At "three!" they gave a mighty push. Over went the ball that had formed the snowman's body.

"Look how soft it is!" cried Polly, poking it with her toe. "It's nothing but slush and water."

"What's that?" Jess's sharp eyes had caught a glimpse of something dark.

She swooped down upon the pile of soft snow and seized the something. A sharp tug, and she had pulled out—her missing glove!"

"Look! Look!" she shouted. "Look! Here's the glove I lost! It was in the snowman all the time!"

The same thought came to Polly and Fred, and they leaped for the fallen snowman's body.

Fred reached it first, and his shoe hit something that gave back a metallic sound.

He stooped and cleared away some of the slush. Slowly he straightened up, something in his hands.

"It's the bank!" screamed Margy. "Fred found the bank! Look! Polly! Jess! Ward! Artie! Look! Fred's found the bank!"

Her excited clamor brought Carrie Pepper from her house. As they crowded around him, Fred saw Carrie come running through the snow.

"So she didn't know a thing about it," he thought. "I'm glad I didn't say anything."

"Is the money there?" Ward kept asking. "Are the dues inside, Fred?"

Well, the money was safe enough, Fred soon discovered. And Jess's glove, dried carefully behind the kitchen range, was pronounced as good as new.

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While Fred wouldn't say that good luck had brought the bank back, he said he was willing Jess should say good luck brought back her glove.

When the grown-ups came home at dusk, they were astonished to have the car surrounded by six dancing Indians who came tumbling out of the Marley house without hats or coats. These Indians danced madly around the car, singing a chorus that at first could not be understood.

"The bank! The bank!" warbled the singers. "Fred found the bank! And Jess's glove—that's found, too! And the money is all right! And the glove is dry and it isn't hurt a bit!"

But when they finally understood, the fathers and mothers were almost as excited as the members of the Riddle Club.

The next morning Mr. Williamson took Fred and the recovered bank and the other five members of the club down to the bank, where an account was opened in the name of the Riddle Club.

"And wait!" said Fred, when he was the proud custodian of the green-covered bankbook. "Wait till the Conundrum Club hears of this!"

THE END

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The Magic Soap Bubble

The king of the gnomes has a magic pipe with which he blows a wonderful bubble and taking Ed. with him they both have a delightful time in Gnomeland.

The Iceberg Express

The Mermaid's magic comb changes little Mary Louise into a mermaid. The Polar Bear Porter on the iceberg Express invites her to take a trip with him and away they go on a little journey to Happyland.

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